



Moran Hall, Oakwood University  
Photo courtesy of Oakwood University Archives.

# Oakwood University

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## **LESLIE N. POLLARD, SAMUEL LONDON, MERVYN A. WARREN, CHERRYL A. GALLEY, LELA GOODING, NIGEL BARHAM, AND SIMONE WELLS**

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In the fall of 1895 the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists commissioned a three-man site location committee to travel south to purchase property for a school to educate African American youth. The group consisted of O. A. Olsen (president of the General Conference); G. A. Irwin (director of the Southern District of the General Conference); and H. Lindsay (former General Conference treasurer). In 1874 Lindsay had also assisted in founding the very first Seventh-day Adventist school, Battle Creek College (Michigan). These men were authorized with a budget of \$8,000 to purchase property for educational use. Traveling through Tennessee, they stopped in Chattanooga and visited the home of L. Dyo Chambers, where they met Anna Knight, an African American woman who would teach at Graysville Academy (forerunner to Southern Adventist University) and also become well known for African American education over the South for more than a half century.

When Olsen, Irwin, and Lindsay arrived in Alabama, they heard of a 360-acre farm five miles west of Huntsville (population 15,000), inspected the property, made their report, and returned to Huntsville to negotiate purchase of the

land. This time M. E. Olsen made up the threesome rather than his father, O. A. Olsen. The community was favorably endorsed also by C. M. Kinney (first ordained black minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church), who, since September 24, 1894, had lived and sown gospel and educational seed in Huntsville: "The school being located so near here [Huntsville] gives me some hope of a happy realization. I think myself that the selection could hardly be bettered."<sup>1</sup>

On January 23, 1896, the \$8,000 bought 360 acres containing 65 towering oak trees, a manor house, nine former slave cabins, an old barn leaning but not looking like the Tower of Pisa, and plenty of choking underbrush, pricking briars, and wilderness. Nevertheless, this wilderness farm was at one time a slave plantation, having had its manor house (named "Old Mansion") visited periodically by former general and United States president Andrew Jackson, who found rest and relaxation sitting before its fireplace as well as enjoying its famous racetrack, and having had on its grounds a man named Sam who had actually lived and worked as a slave on this Peter Blow plantation from 1819 to 1821. Later Sam would change his name to Dred Scott and petition for personal freedom before the Missouri Supreme Court, a move that precipitated the famous Dred Scott decision of 1857 and eventually led to the Civil War.

That formal education should be afforded blacks by the Seventh-day Adventist Church was less a question than what type of education and by what means would that instruction be delivered. By the time Oakwood opened its doors in 1896, at least two dozen colleges by other religious groups and benevolent societies were already sponsoring colleges, mostly in the South, for liberated slaves and their sons and daughters. Some of these institutions may still sound familiar today because they are still operating and sending graduates into all walks of life: Lincoln University (1854 by Presbyterians); Shaw College (1865 by American Baptists); Atlanta University (1866 by AMA); Morehouse College (1867 by Baptists); Howard University (1868 by Freedmen's Bureau); Alabama A&M University (1875 by Alabama legislature); and Tuskegee Institute (1881 by Alabama legislature).

## Industries

Oakwood has had a history of engaging in enterprises that offer employment opportunities for students, to help them earn the funds necessary to complete their education. This model of industrial education was the same as that employed by Booker T. Washington at the Tuskegee Institute established in 1881 in Tuskegee, Alabama. Through the years Oakwood's industries have served not only the campus but the Huntsville community, thereby creating a notable Seventh-day Adventist presence in the area: customers knew that the dairy, bakery, and store were not open on Sabbath; that there were no meat products in the store; that the laundry would not be done or delivered on the Sabbath. At the time of the Oakwood Industrial School (1896–1903), students obtained employment in the following enterprises: cooking and baking, carpet weaving and rugmaking, carpentry and masonry, the laundry, blacksmithing, sewing, farming, and wagon building.<sup>2</sup> These industries were overseen primarily by Solon Marquis Jacobs and Mariette Millard-Jacobs.<sup>3</sup>

During the era of the Oakwood Manual Training School (1904–1916) the various industries and their managers were as follows. The farm was managed by Charles Ruffin, Clarence Jesse Boyd, and Clarence J. Harris, and John M. Swofford.<sup>4</sup> Mechanics, the training of professional farming technicians dealing with the maintenance and repair of cultivation machines, was managed by Evert Bryant Melendy and Fred W. Halladay.<sup>5</sup> Sewing and dressmaking was managed by E. Ella Baber, Olive M. Shannon, Marie Frances Buhalts-Boyd, and Margaret E. Lewis.<sup>6</sup> The printshop, first mentioned in 1912, was managed by Thomas H. Jeys and George H. Jeys.<sup>7</sup> The sanitarium, established in 1909, was managed by Amy I. Bascom, M.D.; Martin M. Martinson, M.D.; Elam Dolphus Haysmer, M.D.; J. E. Caldwell, M.D.; and Etta Reeder.<sup>8</sup> Tent and broommaking, first mentioned in 1915, was managed by D. H. Lewis.<sup>9</sup>

During the time of Oakwood Junior College (1917–1942) the various industries and their managers were as follows: The farm was managed by John M. Swofford, James Olmstead, J. D. Finley, Arthur N. Atteberry, J. F. Street, Thorington Timothy Frazier, and Dennis L. Crosby.<sup>10</sup> Mechanics was managed by Fred W. Halladay, William H. Lewis, Roy A. Jorgenson, C. G. Stewart, H. C. Nelson, and Espie Ulysses Carter.<sup>11</sup> Sewing and dressmaking was managed by Margaret E. Lewis, Jennie Stratton, Mary Davis, and Alyce Frazier.<sup>12</sup> The printshop was managed by George H. Jeys, O. E. Thompson, Roy A. Jorgenson, Karl F. Ambs, C. R. Wood, Herman R. Murphy, George A. Smallwood, and Louis Johnson.<sup>13</sup> The sanitarium was managed by Etta Reeder; Empress B. Sampson; Martin M. Martinson, M.D.; Myrtle Bain; Mrs. W. H. Green; and Lenward L. Holness, M.D.<sup>14</sup> The carpenters' shop and lumber mill was managed by Frank Lewis W. Clark, William H. Lewis, Claude L. Dortch, Roy Cole, John M. Swofford, and Harry D. Dobbins.<sup>15</sup> Broommaking was managed by J. D. Finley.<sup>16</sup> Apiculture, that is, beekeeping, was managed by L. E. Allen and L. O. Irons.<sup>17</sup> Gardening was managed by J. D. Finley, John M. Swofford, and Asa W. Kimbrough.<sup>18</sup> The orphanage was managed by Emma O. Wade, Jefferson W. Wade, Mary Kimbrough, and Mrs. Lallage J. Egleston.<sup>19</sup> The paintshop was managed by Karl F. Ambs.<sup>20</sup> The laundry was managed by Eugenia Isabella Cunningham.<sup>21</sup> The poultry department was managed by Edward Claire Jacobsen, Karl F. Ambs, Charles Degering, U. Bender, and Arthur N. Atteberry.<sup>22</sup> The dairy was managed by George L. Sampson, Edward Claire Jacobsen, John M. Swofford, Walter Martin, Arthur N. Atteberry, and Espie Ulysses Carter.<sup>23</sup> The cannery was managed by Asa W. Kimbrough.<sup>24</sup> Transportation services was managed by Roy Cole, Charles Degering, and Lyman D. Randall.<sup>25</sup> The store, its presence being documented as early as 1924, was managed by Charles Degering, Lyman D. Randall, and Eugenia Isabella Cunningham.<sup>26</sup> The orchard was managed by Edward Claire Jacobsen.<sup>27</sup> The automobile garage, its presence being documented as early as 1924, was managed by C. G. Stewart.<sup>28</sup> There is also documentation of the presence of a mattress-making industry.<sup>29</sup> However, the managers of this enterprise are not mentioned by name.

In the Oakwood College period (1943–2007) the various industries and their managers were as follows: The farm was managed by M. B. Turner, Dennis L. Crosby, W. D. Shavers, Rothacker Smith, M. C. Custard, Lawrence Jacobs, Sr.,

and Charles Turner.<sup>30</sup> Laundry and drycleaning was managed by Eugenia Isabella Cunningham, Titus Duncan, Joseph C. Emerson, Marile Emerson, Wilbur Daniels, Sylvanus Merchant, Vincent Beale, Nathan Peters, and Joseph Haynes.<sup>31</sup> The store was managed by Eugenia Isabella Cunningham, Charles Eugene Galley, Richard Simons, Festus H. Valentine, Violin G. Plummer, J. E. Merideth, Alfonzo Greene, Sr., Harry Swinton, and Kenneth Jenkins.<sup>32</sup> The dairy was managed by Espie Ulysses Carter, M. C. Custard, Dennis L. Crosby, Robert L. Reynolds, Lawrence Jacobs, Sr., Lawrence Jacobs, Jr., Harry Dobbins, and Charles Turner.<sup>33</sup> Carpentry and industrial education was managed by Herman L. Wright, John Blake, and Isaac Palmer.<sup>34</sup> The college press was managed by Murray J. Harvey, Neville Parkinson, Fred Taylor, and Harry Swinton.<sup>35</sup> The bakery was managed by J. P. Willis, Preston Calhoun, Violin G. Plummer, J. E. Merideth, Harry Swinton, Vincent Beale, and David Rugless.<sup>36</sup> The broom factory was managed by W. Ralph Davis.<sup>37</sup> The automobile repair clinic was managed by Joe Cotton.<sup>38</sup> The managers of the radio station WOCG/WJOU, officially established in 1979, included James and Ethel Dykes, Stanley Ware, Donald L. McPaul, Haller H. Hill, David T. Person, and Victoria Joiner. By 1986–1987 the college phased out most industries, because they were deemed to be financially unprofitable. The cemetery Oakwood Memorial Gardens, established in 2001, was under the management of Fred Pullins.

In the current Oakwood University era (2008 to present), the institution's leadership adopted an initiative to create and acquire new industries. The various industries and their managers are as follows: Cemetery managers include Fred Pullins, and Gerald Kibble. Radio station managers include Victoria Joiner, Reginald Hicks, and Audree Johnson. Oakwood University Broadcasting Network (OUBN), the brainchild of Roengsak Cartwright, came into being in 2011. OUBN television managers include Anthony Perkins, and Kenrunne Dixon. In 2014 and 2015 the university purchased Edible Arrangement franchises in Whitesburg Plaza and University Drive. These are managed by Mark Taylor and John Patton. Oakwood Farms, established in 2017, is under the management of Artis Sidney.

## Construction of Moran Hall

By the time James L. Moran came into office as the president of Oakwood Junior College in 1932, the campus was in dire need of more classroom space and an auditorium that could accommodate the expanding student body during campuswide assemblies or major functions. But like the rest of America, the Seventh-day Adventist Church and Oakwood were caught in the Great Depression and there were no funds available for construction. As Moran (a visionary with exceptional administrative skills) prayed and strategized with faculty and staff, they conceived the idea of constructing a building larger than any on the campus. The use of student labor would significantly reduce the cost of construction.

Students responded to the idea with enthusiasm and construction began in 1939.<sup>39</sup> Students worked in exchange for tuition and other expenses. They carved stones from Oakwood's nearby mountain quarry and used them to build the walls of the building. The first stage of the project was completed in May 1940 at a cost of \$30,000.<sup>40</sup> It was built with an assembly hall with seating capacity of 540. It also contained ten large classrooms, four offices, and a recreational hall. By 1944 the second stage was completed, adding both the East section and the West section. The total cost for the construction was roughly \$72,000—showing an incredible savings for which the entire campus gave fervent thanks to God.

Moran Hall not only served as a place for instruction, but also as a place for Sabbath services and weekly chapel. In its early years the departments of Business, English, and Education were housed in this building, and through the years, other departments would call Moran Hall home.

Besides being built by the students, Moran Hall has had other historic impact. In 1945 the first bachelor's degree commencement exercises were held in the auditorium. The following year Eva B. Dykes conducted the first annual concert of Handel's *Messiah* with the newly formed Aeolians student choir. Moran Hall was also the location of the crowning of the college's first Miss UNCF (United Negro College Fund)—in 1969. This historic building held various events such as freshman orientations, vespers, weddings, funerals, and other community programs.

In 1992 Carlton P. Byrd (president of the United Student Movement)<sup>41</sup> led a charge for the renovation of the Moran Hall Auditorium. In a letter addressed to the student leaders on campus, Byrd pointed to the fact that students were the ones who originally built Moran, and that it was up to the current students to make an effort to bring the building up-to-date. His plans led to extensive renovation of the auditorium. Today Moran Hall continues to be a gracious landmark on the Oakwood campus, and with further renovation and modernizing, it currently houses the Department of History and Political Science, as well as the Department of English and Foreign Languages.

## Principals

Solon Marquis Jacobs (1846–1927) was the first principal of the Oakwood Industrial School (1896–1903), the school that would become Oakwood University. He served as principal in the years 1896 and 1897. Solon was born on October 7, 1846, to Alexander Isaac C. Jacobs (1819–1855) and Lydia Augusta Robinson (1825–1903) in Tonawanda, New York. On April 17, 1869, Jacobs married Mariette Millard in Jefferson, Wisconsin. The couple had three children: Lewen Ansel (1876–1953), Clara Lydia (1879–1951), and Burton LeRoy (1883–1948). In 1882 Jacobs joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Fontanelle, Iowa. Between the years 1889 and 1894 he served within the Iowa Conference of Seventh-day Adventists as a licensed missionary, minister, Tract Society field secretary, and conference official.<sup>42</sup> In 1896 Jacobs accepted a request from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to move to Huntsville, Alabama, and become the superintendent of the denomination's newly acquired property

purchased for the purpose of establishing a school for blacks. The Jacobs family arrived on April 3, 1896<sup>43</sup> An evening school was quickly established with Lewen, Jacobs' son, serving as the first academic instructor.<sup>44</sup> From 1897 to 1902 Jacobs continued working at Oakwood in the capacity of business manager and superintendent of industrial/vocational education.<sup>45</sup>

Henry S. Shaw (1860–1931) was Oakwood's second principal. He served in this capacity from 1897 to 1899. Henry was born on November 7, 1860, to Rollo Shaw and Rhoda E. Scantlin in Athens, Illinois.<sup>46</sup> On March 1, 1883, he married Celia Maria Hicks (1860–1932) in Gibson, Illinois. The couple had a daughter, Bertha Dela (1888–1973). In 1882 Shaw joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Seven years later he was named secretary of the colporteur work in the Illinois Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. In 1892 he became an ordained minister. Subsequently, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists employed him as a pioneer evangelist for the Southern states. In 1897 he became the principal at Oakwood. However, recurring bouts of malaria caused him to resign in 1899.<sup>47</sup>

Benn Eugene Nicola (1865–1943) was Oakwood's third principal. He served from 1899 to 1904. During his term the institution's name was changed to the Oakwood Manual Training School (1904–1916). Benn was born on June 12, 1865, to Zalmon Nicola (1836–1929) and Mary Elizabeth Kinsey (1838–1925) in Washington County, Iowa. In 1893 he earned a bachelor's degree from Battle Creek College in Battle Creek, Michigan. The following year Nicola married Hattie Mae Case (1868–1927) on June 21 in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The couple had five children: Tesla (1896–1971), Aileen Janna (1898–1982), Shirley June (1900–1991), Audrey Zalmon (1902–1988), and Quintus (1906–1972). After graduation, he joined the faculty of the English Department at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska. During the summers he engaged in evangelistic work and ultimately became an ordained minister in 1899. That year Nicola accepted an offer to become the principal at Oakwood. He remained for five years, and then left to assume the principalship of Battle Creek Academy in Battle Creek, Michigan.<sup>48</sup>

Fred R. Rogers (1869–1920) was Oakwood's fourth principal. He held this office in the years 1904 and 1905. Fred was born on January 3, 1869, to George Washington Rogers and Rockellett Edwards in Mendota, Minnesota.<sup>49</sup> On January 1, 1894, he married Minnie Abigail Graves (1869–1957) in Yamhill, Oregon. Children from this union include Chester Leroy (1895–1960), Doris (1904–1995), and Wava Alene (1909–1999). Rogers is best known as one of the missionary volunteers working with James Edson White (aboard the *Morning Star* riverboat), who brought the Adventist message to blacks in the Mississippi Delta. In 1905 Rogers left Oakwood to become the superintendent of Seventh-day Adventist mission schools throughout the Southern Union Conference.<sup>50</sup>

Granville H. Baber was Oakwood's fifth principal. He held this office in the years 1905 and 1906. Granville was born on April 18, 1852, to Powhatan Bolling Baber (1824–1900) and Caroline Tugglene (1827–1903) in West Virginia. On February 15, 1882, he married Ella Eliz Craw (1861–1938) in Champaign, Illinois. The couple had two sons: Erl Armitage (1883–1957), and George Herbert Baber (1898–1980). Baber and his wife served as missionaries in Chile, South America, spending 11 years in administrative and evangelistic work. On returning to the United States in 1902, he joined the faculty of the Southern Training School in Graysville, Tennessee, teaching history and Spanish.<sup>51</sup> In 1905 Baber accepted the offer to become the principal at Oakwood. The following year he returned to the faculty at the Southern Training School.<sup>52</sup>

Walter James Blake (1873–1926) was the sixth Oakwood principal. He served in this capacity from 1906 to 1911. Walter was born on June 5, 1873, to Andrew Blake (1835–1895) and Jane McMillen (1850–1877) in Quebec, Canada. In 1899 he married Mary Alice Owen (1877–1945) in Quebec City, Quebec, Canada. The couple had two children: Florence (1900–1992), and Owen (1905–1974). Shortly after the birth of their first child, Blake accepted a ministerial position in the Mississippi Conference of Seventh-day Adventists where he labored for three and a half years. In 1906 he accepted the principalship of Oakwood and moved his family to Huntsville, Alabama. Blake continued in this office until 1911, when he left to become the president of Oshawa Missionary College in Ontario, Canada.<sup>53</sup> In 1969 a newly constructed building on the campus of Oakwood College was named and dedicated to his memory. The W. J. Blake Memorial Center currently houses administrative offices, the cafeteria, and student center.

Clarence Jesse Boyd (1877–1966) was the seventh Oakwood principal. He served from 1911 to 1917. Clarence was born on October 10, 1877, to Benjamin Thomas Boyd (1848–1933) and Julia E. Weir (1856–1917) in Muncie, Indiana. In preparation for a career as a teacher and school administrator, Boyd studied at Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Indiana, and Battle Creek College in Battle Creek, Michigan. On December 23, 1903, he married Marie Frances Buhalts (1880–1964) in Shelby County, Indiana. The couple had a son, Harold Buhalts (1904–1981). In 1907 Boyd accepted an invitation to teach at Oakwood. In addition to providing classroom instruction, he served as superintendent of a number of the institution's industries. In 1910 he was elected principal. During his administration Boyd bolstered Oakwood's academic offerings to such a degree that in his last year the school achieved junior college status. In 1917 he left Oakwood to establish the West Indian Training School in Mandeville, Jamaica. On successfully completing that goal, Boyd went to Trinidad in 1926 and started the East Caribbean Training School in St. Joseph, Trinidad.<sup>54</sup>

## Presidents

James Irving Beardsley served as the first president of Oakwood Junior College from 1917 to 1923. Joseph A. Tucker served as the president of Oakwood Junior College from 1923 to 1932. James Lewis Moran was the first African American to occupy the position of president at Oakwood Junior College, he served from 1932 to 1945. Under his leadership the school obtained senior college status.

Frank Loris Peterson served as president of Oakwood College from 1945 to 1954. Garland Jefferson Millet was the

president of Oakwood College from 1954 to 1963. Under his leadership Oakwood obtained regional accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Addison Vastapha Pinkney served as the president of Oakwood College from 1963 to 1966.

Frank W. Hale, Jr., was the seventh president of Oakwood College serving from 1966 to 1971. To date, Hale holds the distinction of being the only nonclergy to occupy the office of president. Calvin B. Rock served as the president of Oakwood College from 1971 to 1985. During his tenure there was a significant expansion of academic programs and the construction of several new campus facilities. Emerson A. Cooper served as president of Oakwood College, albeit in an interim capacity, in 1985.

Benjamin F. Reaves was the president of Oakwood College from 1985 to 1996. Delbert W. Baker served as the president of Oakwood College from 1996 to 2010. During his administration Oakwood College was elevated to university status in 2008. Mervyn A. Warren served as the president of Oakwood University in an interim capacity in 2010 and 2011.

In 2001 Leslie N. Pollard became the president of Oakwood University. Pollard presented his vision for the institution at the Spring Convocation of January 25, 2011. He named his presentation "Vision 20/20," a creatively crafted title for optimizing his view of success through lenses of excellence.<sup>44</sup> The twenty/twenty formula of President Pollard envisioned facilitating a redefinition of the contours of black and diversified higher education for the twenty-first century. This plan featured the following points.

A new strategic plan for global educational expansion through the Consortium of Adventist African Universities and Partners (CAAUP)

Groundbreaking findings by Life-Core Research

Recovery of industries to create nontuition based revenue

Investing millions of dollars in new construction including a 11,700-square-foot Oakwood University Media Center home of the Oakwood University Broadcasting Network (OUBN)

Creating an online platform for Leadership Education for the Adult Professional (LEAP Program) and launching Oakwood Online University

Worldwide evangelism through 4HIM mission trips conducted by Oakwood University

## Faculty Senate

For many years the faculty had expressed a desire to be more involved in the decision-making process of Oakwood College through the establishment of a Faculty Senate. After several unsuccessful attempts, a new college president (Benjamin Reaves) agreed to consider the concept—provided the authority of the administration was not superseded. Consequently, C. Garland Dulan, professor of sociology, and Nigel Barham, professor of history, developed a provisional faculty senate constitution based on those of other Adventist colleges.<sup>55</sup> After careful review, and several drafts, the constitution was approved by the Academic Policies Committee and the Faculty Assembly. On October 15, 1987, "the college board of trustees approved a proposal for the establishment of a Faculty Senate."<sup>56</sup>

According to Article 1 of the constitution, the Faculty Senate is a recommending body and "its actions are subject to approval by the Faculty Assembly and the president of the college."<sup>57</sup> To ensure that the senate was cooperative, Dulan (the newly installed vice president for academic affairs) was appointed senate chair. He along with five other administrators was included in the makeup of the 21-member senate. After three years, during which time the senate demonstrated full cooperation with the university's governance, the six administrators were removed and Barham (the senate vice chair) was elected chair. On December 27, 1992, the chair designation was replaced with that of Faculty Senate president.<sup>58</sup>

The senate still has a membership of 21, with each academic department represented. There are three principal officers of the senate: the president, the vice president and the secretary. The bulk of the senate's work is conducted through its four standing committees: Executive, Budget and Efficiency, Curriculum, and Faculty Affairs.

The Executive Committee is composed of the three primary senate officers and the chairs of the other three committees. Its purpose is to plan the agenda for the monthly senate meetings, review the policy recommendations of the other committees, and handle urgent matters of the Senate between sessions. The purpose of the Budget and Efficiency Committee is to “study the financial efficiency of the academic program and each academic department,” and to assist the vice president for academic administration/provost in reviewing the budget requests of academic departments.<sup>59</sup> The purpose of the Curriculum Committee is “to conduct a continuous study of the educational program in general, including long range considerations, and specific plans for improvements,” and review the degree requirements, majors, courses, and other academic programs offered, and recommend changes.<sup>60</sup> The purpose of the Faculty Affairs Committee is to “study matters dealing with faculty welfare, review and suggest changes to the Faculty Handbook, and serve as a grievance committee for faculty complaints.”<sup>61</sup>

Major achievements of the Faculty Senate included: assisting the administration in changing from the quarter to the semester system (1995), starting the Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies program (2007), and attaining university status (2008). The senate was also instrumental in establishing new academic departments, such as: Adult and Continuing Education, Communications, and Allied Health. It also approved the creation of new majors, including Biology, Business Administration, Fitness and Wellness, International Studies, and Spanish.

The senate was also tasked with carrying out major revisions to the Faculty Handbook, reviewing general education requirements, approving recommended course fees, as well as faculty remuneration benefits and publishing stipends.

In conclusion, the Faculty Senate is an integral part of Oakwood University—cooperating effectively with the administration and improving faculty morale.

## Oakwood University Church

Oakwood University church is located at 5500 Adventist Boulevard NW, Huntsville, Alabama 35896. The church was started on November 7, 1896, just one week before Oakwood Industrial College (now called Oakwood University) opened its doors. Evangelism in the South had been sparked by Ellen White’s speech entitled “Our Duty to the Colored People.” Charles M. Kinney, one of the first black evangelists within Adventism, suggested that Huntsville would be an ideal location for building a school and church for black Adventists.<sup>52</sup>

The first known meeting place of the new church was in the property’s former slave cabins. It then moved to the Old Mansion, where the school’s principal lived. The next location was Chapel Hall, which was built in 1899 and also used as a boys dorm. After a fire destroyed Chapel Hall in 1906, Study Hall was built (1907), and worship was held there. As the congregation continued to grow, it then moved to Moran Hall, which was built in 1940. They worshipped in the auditorium, and when membership got too large for one service, they held two services. Two services proved impractical, and the church moved to Ashby Auditorium, the gymnasium, in 1957. The deacons rearranged chairs every week for Sabbath service. With burgeoning membership and logistical problems, it was clear that it was time to erect a building that would serve solely as a church.

The idea for building a permanent church was first broached during Von Goethe Lindsay’s leadership in 1961. Under Richard Tottress’ tenure, pledges and gifts were placed into a savings account to fund the future church building. In 1972, when Tottress was pastor for a second term, he made building a church the top priority. The South Central Conference and Oakwood’s president, Calvin B. Rock, along with Tottress, decided to look for another pastor who would head the building of the new church.

Eric Calvin Ward was a well-known evangelistic pastor from California. He was selected as pastor to build the permanent home for the church. He was a very organized man and very efficient.<sup>63</sup> Groundbreaking for the church occurred on June 15, 1975. The church was finished two years later, and the grand opening was on September 3, 1977. Construction of the church included that of an adjoining building to house the Religion Department of the college. Along with Pastor Ward, the people responsible for the construction of the new church building are as follows: Robert H. Pearson, General Conference president; H. H. Schmidt, Southern Union Conference president; Charles E. Dudley, South Central Conference president; and Calvin B. Rock, Oakwood College president. Ward’s dynamic leadership resulted in the church mortgage being retired on September 3, 1983.

When the church was first established in 1896, it was under the auspices of the General Conference. This changed when black Adventists, feeling that they were not being treated fairly in the denomination, organized regional conferences, which gave them control of domestic church matters. When the South Central Conference was organized in 1946, Oakwood College church was transferred to its domain.

Following is a list of the pastors who served the Oakwood church over the years: S. M. Jacobs (1896–1906), W. J. Blake (1906–1911), W. L. Bird (1911–1917), W. H. Baker (1917–1924), I. V. Counsell (1924–1926), U. Bender (1926–1933), Calvin E. Moseley (1934–1951), Robert L. Woodfork (1951–1953), Clarence T. Richards (1953–1955), Jesse T. Wagner (1955–1956), Joseph T. Stafford (1956–1959), John J. Beale (1959–1961), Von Goethe Lindsay (1961–1964), Ned Lindsay (1964–1967), Richard E. Tottress (1967–1969; 1972–1973), William L. DeShay (1969–1972), Eric C. Ward (1973–1994), Leslie N. Pollard (1994–1997), John S. Nixon (1997–2006), Craig Newborn (2006–2012), and Carlton P. Byrd (2012–present). Each pastor has done significant work at the Oakwood University church.

The first six pastors of the Oakwood church were white. Calvin E. Moseley was the first black man to pastor the church. At this time, the pastor of the church also served as head of the Religion Department. Jesse R. Wagner was

the first conference-assigned pastor of the church.

During the years 1951–1969 the Oakwood church grew significantly in membership. One of the most prosperous times of the Oakwood Church was under the leadership of Ward, who was the pastor who facilitated the building of the permanent church building. He also was known for his evangelism in the community. He hosted tent crusades off Pulaski Drive, baptizing hundreds of souls. His evangelist efforts not only built the membership of Oakwood church, but also the Adventist community in Huntsville. The Oakwood Adventist Academy building was also completed under the leadership of Ward.<sup>64</sup>

Another significant era for the church was under the leadership of Carlton Byrd. Byrd became the pastor in 2012. He is an evangelist who started “Revival and Rejuvenation,” which are annual evangelistic revivals; community outreach programs; and specific ministries to reach church members, community residents, and university students. Byrd is also the director of *Breath of Life* television ministries, a weekly internationally broadcasted television program whose home base is at Oakwood University church. Byrd also renovated parts of the church, including the foyer, restrooms, kitchen, classroom facilities, and platform area, and installed media lighting and high definition video walls. He also opened the Oakwood University church market and built Oakwood Adventist Academy Phase II (gymnasium, cafeteria, middle school). The newest addition to the church under his leadership, the family life center, includes a gymnasium, classrooms, commercial kitchen, the Oakwood University church market, a barbershop, medical room, and community service distribution center. The family life center was opened on February 24, 2018.

When Oakwood College became Oakwood University in 2008, the church became Oakwood University church. The target group of people that the Oakwood University church tries to reach are blacks in the community and the college students at the university.

Clearly Oakwood University is dedicated to delivering Christian education based on the principle that “the work of education and the work of redemption are one,” which empowers learning and faith to join hands and lead teacher, student, and the world they serve to the abundant life in Jesus Christ.<sup>47</sup>

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