

Richards, Clarence Theodore

(1912–1995)

T. JAMES JACKSON

T. James Jackson is a history major student at Oakwood University, Huntsville, Alabama. Jackson is also an accomplished musician.

Clarence Theodore Richards, better known as C. T. Richards, was a preacher and professor of religion who worked for more than fifty years in Adventist education and ministry. For most of his career he taught and served in various capacities at Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama.

Richards was born on July 23, 1912, in New York City to John Richards and Lillian Theodora Map (1890–1990). After the early death of his father, his mother, who was born in Barbados, married Phillip Atkins (1884–1954), who was also from Barbados, on

May 3, 1919. He spent the majority of his formative years between New York City and Boston. As a young man Richards heard the message of Adventism from of a group of friends. He began attending the Ephesus church in New York City under the pastorate of G. E. Peters. However, after moving to Boston, he was baptized by M. Campbell at the Boston Berea church.

Shortly after his baptism Richards decided to further his education and Christian experience by moving to Huntsville, Alabama, to attend Oakwood Academy in 1933. He matriculated to Oakwood College the following year. At that time the student population was one hundred.¹

He graduated with an associate degree from the college in 1938, continuing his education at Emmanuel Missionary College in Berrien Springs, Michigan. There he majored in history and religion, graduating with a bachelor's degree in May 1940. He later returned to Berrien Springs to complete the requirements for a Bachelors of Divinity, which he obtained in November of 1962.



Clarence Theodore Richards

Photo courtesy of Oakwood University Archives.

While at Oakwood, Richards met and married Genevieve Alcyone Laurence (1914–1993) in 1935. Born in Kentucky, she was the daughter of Joseph H. Laurence (1885–1987) and Geneva Wilson (1884–1937). Together they parented three children: Clarence (deceased), Philip, and Carmen Duncan.²

Richards began his pastoral ministry in Evanston, Illinois, following graduation from Emmanuel Missionary College. He remained there until the spring of 1943 and then was called to pastor in East St. Louis, Illinois. In 1945 Richards was sent to Toledo, Ohio, to conduct ministerial work. On March 1, 1947, he was ordained an elder at Shiloh SDA Church in Cincinnati.

He received an invitation to join the Theology Department of Oakwood College in August 1947. For the next 35 years Richards devoted most of his time to teaching all basic Bible subjects to scores of students. He began teaching alongside such notables as the late C. E. Moseley and E. E. Rogers. In 1952, after the departure of longtime professor Calvin E. Moseley, Richards was elected chair of the Religion Department. He held that office for the next 17 years. While teaching full-time at the college, he also found time to serve as pastor to a couple of local congregations: First SDA church (1949–1952) and the Oakwood College church (1952–1955).

Working within the confines of a cramped office on the main floor of Moran Hall, Richards sought to make the Theology Department exemplify organization and precision, qualities that he personally possessed. Several classes were added to the course list under Richards' leadership. These included Life and Teachings of Jesus, Bible Survey, and Spirit of Prophecy. Richards is remembered by his students as a caring professor determined to see their spiritual feet on solid ground. He was trustworthy and well liked by his students. Ask a student what they remember most about Richards, and they will probably say he kept long lists of facts. Richards kept a list for everything biblically related.³ In an interview conducted by a research student in 1976, Richards speaks of his presence in the School of Theology: "I taught every Bible class. In some cases, I taught every section of a class. Most students came through me. I have some people whose parents I taught."⁴

Because of his love for the student body, Richards served in other capacities at the college as well. He was sponsor of the United Student Movement, a student-led governing body, for several years and longtime president of the now-defunct Oakwood College Federal Credit Union. He also served as advisor for various campus clubs and associations, including the Oakwood Chapel Hour (radio program),⁵ the Ministerial Seminar Club, and the Student Association.⁶ Richards remained chair of the Theology Department until the 1968–1969 school year. He did, however, remain an active faculty member of the Theology Department, for several years continuing to impact many lives along the way. According to Richards:

I could always express a deep love and appreciate for this institution, because I came here as a student. I have high regard for the teachers and the institution because I left into the ministry, then I was called back. I could never express fullest appreciation. The salaries were small, but the pay was great. That's been my greatest reward to see the young people come in as freshmen and go out a finished product of Oakwood.⁷

Richards continued to teach courses well after his formal retirement in 1980. For his extensive years of service to Oakwood, he was granted the distinction of being professor emeritus.⁸ “No deviation from strict integrity can meet God’s approval” was Richards’ daily motto and creed.⁹ These words were uttered so often that it became a daily mantra for students and staff campus wide and was even penned in the 1952 edition of *The Acorn*, which was dedicated to Richards.¹⁰ Never unwavering in his service for the Lord, Richards worked untiringly to spread the love of Christ until his death on November 21, 1995, in Owosso, Michigan.

Longtime Oakwood college professor and colleague, E. E. Rogers remembers Richards as a man who possessed a quiet demeanor, remaining conservative in his spiritual views. His faith was unwavering, and his life exemplified the love of Christ to not only his students, but his colleagues as well. Rogers believes that his dignified outlook on the work of the department is what has made it survive today.¹¹ Richards is responsible for teaching thousands of Oakwood students, including many notable Seventh-day Adventist preachers. He garnered the respect, gained the admiration, and was loved by students and fellow faculty and staff. His faithfulness in study gained the confidence of every student he taught, and most will remember him for his extensive knowledge of Scripture and firm adherence to Seventh-day Adventist principles.

SOURCES

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Funeral program for Genevieve Alcyone Laurence Richards. Huntsville, Alabama: Royal Funeral Home, 1993.

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NOTES

1. Jannith Lewis, “Elder C. T. Richards,” *North American Regional Voice*, January 1983, Oakwood University Archives.

2. ² Funeral program for Genevieve Alcyone Laurence Richards (Huntsville, Alabama: Royal Funeral Home, 1993).
3. Garland Dulan, interview by author, Huntsville, Alabama, February 14, 2018.
4. Kenneth Unick, "Interview With Elder Calvin Moseley and Elder C. T. Richards," 1976, Oakwood University Archives.
5. Oakwood College, *The Acom, 1956* (Huntsville, Alabama: Oakwood College Press, 1956), Digital, Oakwood University Library Archives.
6. Oakwood College, *The Acom, 1964* (Huntsville, Alabama: Oakwood College Press, 1964), Digital, Oakwood University Library Archives.
7. *Oakwood College Bulletin, 1984–1986* (Huntsville, Alabama: Oakwood College, 1984).
8. Ibid.
9. Funeral program for Clarence T. Richards (Huntsville, Alabama: Royal Funeral Home, 1995).
10. Oakwood College, *The Acom, 1952* (Huntsville, Alabama: Oakwood College Press, 1952), Digital, Oakwood University Library Archives.
11. Ernest E. Rogers, interview by author, Huntsville, Alabama, February 14, 2018.

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