



# PILLARS OF PENTECOST

*Church of God History  
Our First Fifty Years*







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# PILLARS OF PENTECOST

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**David G. Roebuck, Ph.D.,** serves as director of the Dixon Pentecostal Research Center and historian of the Church of God. An ordained bishop, he is an assistant professor of History of

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Church of God Historical Commission  
Revised

Welcome to the sixth release of a series of pictorial historic overviews of significant areas of Church of God history. The Historical Commission commends Dr. David G. Roebuck and his team at the Dixon Pentecostal Research Center for another well-planned, expertly designed, and thoroughly prepared volume. As we peruse *Pillars of Pentecost*, it is our prayer that this trip down memory lane will birth a renewed appreciation in each of us for our rich Church of God heritage and the faithful service of so many who brought us to this day.

This biennial volume was birthed as the vision of our most recent previous chairperson, Dr. Floyd D. Carey, who served longer as a member of the Historical Commission (22 years) and longer as chair (16 years) than anyone in the history of the Commission. Brother Carey envisioned a historic volume that would be provided free of charge at every General Assembly to inform today's church about significant sections of our heritage. Because there was no budget for the book, Dr. Carey personally raised the necessary funds. Although the cost of production has risen exponentially over the years, this is still our practice. I am grateful to the list of sponsors who appear on page 2 who have responded to my personal appeal and have donated to make this volume possible.

In this issue, we give special honor to Mr. R. Joel Trammell, a Commission member for twenty-two years, who passed away on September 4, 2022. Trammell was the quintessential Church of God historian, who for the entirety of his eighty-one years, walked, talked, lived, and breathed Church of God history.

On behalf of the Church of God Historical Commission; our Executive Committee Liaison, Dr. Tony Stewart; our Church of God Historian, Dr. David G. Roebuck; and the Dixon Pentecostal Research Center; we commend this book to you. We are also pleased to dedicate it to the memory of our friend and colleague, Mr. R. Joel Trammell.

James E. Cossey, *Chair*  
Church of God Historical Commission

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**ON THE COVER:** *Delegates to the eighth General Assembly, January 7-12, 1913, stand in front of the North Cleveland Church of God. The Cleveland church was established on October 10, 1906, and this building dedicated the next year. The local congregation hosted Church of God General Assemblies from 1908 to 1915 and again in 1919.*





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## IN MEMORY OF ROBERT JOEL TRAMMELL

Robert Joel Trammell was five years old when he joined the Church of God, and he remained a member until he transitioned to heaven at age eighty-one. From childhood, Trammell was enamored by Church of God history; and over the years, he amassed perhaps the largest single collection of our denomination's history, documents, and memorabilia outside the Dixon Pentecostal Research Center. Much of the upstairs floor of his and Sue Stone Trammell's retirement home in Middlesex, North Carolina, was dedicated as a private heritage collection!

Trammell received his Bachelor of Science degree from Lee University and lived in Cleveland, Tennessee, for fifteen years. His studies at Lee and his employment at the *Cleveland Daily Banner* served to further stimulate his hunger for the procurement of historical data regarding the Church of God. He would later receive his Master of Arts and the Ed.S. from Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, while also serving as assistant principal at Azalea Garden Christian School. For twenty-six years, he taught Advanced Placement History, and was twice named *History Teacher of the Year* for Virginia Beach Public Schools where he also received the *Governor's Excellence in Teaching* award. For thirty-seven years, Trammell served as assistant professor of history at Tidewater Community College.

Joel Trammell holds the distinction of having served simultaneously as the official Church of God historian in two states—Eastern North Carolina and Virginia—while also serving as a member of the International Historical Commission. He wrote and published a history of the Azalea Garden Church of God in Norfolk, Virginia, and published numerous articles in such publications as *Church of God History and Heritage* and the *Church of God Evangel*.

A valued member of the Historical Commission, Trammell's presence, his vast knowledge of history, and his ability to contribute to the corporate acumen of the group, are greatly missed.

In appreciation for his dedication to the preservation and the teaching of history, especially Church of God history, the Church of God Historical Commission gratefully dedicates this 2024 publication, *Pillars of Pentecost*, to his memory.





*James Marshall's painting of how the Spurling mill might have looked. There is no known photo of the mill.*



# BORN IN CHRISTIAN UNION

*“And upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18b KJV).*

## Gathering at the Spurling Mill

Anticipation and excitement accompanied a sober sense of obligation as a small congregation gathered at the Spurling Mill on August 19, 1886. Most residents of the surrounding communities must have been aware of the message Richard Green Spurling (1857–1935) had

been proclaiming the previous two years. Commonly known by his initials, R.G., the formerly licensed Baptist preacher desired to reform area churches and establish a Christian Movement that was less exclusive than the Missionary Baptist churches around him.

History has left few details about what happened that Thursday in the mill located along Barney Creek in Monroe County, Tennessee. We have no record of how many attended nor is there a known

photograph of the mill or of those who responded to Spurling’s call for action. What is unmistakable is that the desire to be God’s church is the deepest root in Church of God history.

The meeting opened with prayer, and then R.G. Spurling delivered “a strong discourse,” “emphasizing the need for a reformation.” Our earliest report describes the events, “The arguments were full of force and proved effective, and were endorsed by the hearers, so that when the

**1810**  
Richard Spurling is born in North Carolina



**1853**  
Clear Creek Baptist Church ordains Richard Spurling

**1857**  
Richard Green (R.G) Spurling is born in Kentucky

**1859**  
Richard Spurling assists in organizing Holly Springs Baptist Church



**1869**  
R.G. Spurling is converted





time came for action there was free and earnest response.”

Following his discourse, Spurling made an appeal to his hearers to join together to establish a new Christian Movement:

As many Christians as are here present that are desirous to be free from all men-made creeds and traditions, and are willing to take the New Testament, or law of Christ, as your only rule of faith and practice; giving each other equal rights and privilege to read and interpret for yourselves as your conscience may dictate, and are willing to set [*sic*] together as the Church of God to transact business as the same, come forward.

Eight responded to the young Spurling’s appeal, including his father, Elder Richard Spurling, who was an ordained Baptist minister. Although the younger R.G. Spurling had given up his ministerial credentials, the emerging congregation regarded his father Richard’s ordination as sufficient authority to organize a new church. Under the elder Spurling’s guidance, they set in order a congregation, which they called Christian Union. They then decided to receive members and to recognize ministers. With these agreements in place, the newly established church received R.G. Spurling as a member. The next month, Elder Richard Spurling ordained his son, R.G., as the first pastor of the Christian Union.

Looking back, we regard events on that August day as the founding of the Church of God whose international offices are in Cleveland, Tennessee, USA,

and whose ministry now reaches more than 8 million people in 191 countries and territories of the world.

### The Need for Reformation

R.G. Spurling’s passion to establish the Christian Union arose from years of frustration the 29-year-old preacher had experienced with area Missionary Baptist churches. A very narrow vision of God’s church taught by the Landmark Baptist Movement had influenced congregations in eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina. Accentuating Proverbs 22:28, “Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set,” they taught that only certain Baptists were in God’s church, practiced closed Communion, and insisted Baptist ministers refrain from associating with non-Baptists. Disagreeing with their restrictive theology and practice, Spurling believed God’s church could not be limited by their exclusiveness. He later recalled, “Having felt it my duty to read my Bible in search of the truth, I soon found myself, so to speak, trying to run a broad-gauge engine on a narrow-gauge railway. ...I failed to accept all of their creed....” In Spurling’s experience, Landmark Baptist creeds and traditions had replaced the New Testament and Christian love.

The Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, where Spurling was a member and which had previously licensed him to preach, insisted he discontinue fellowship and ministry with non-Baptists. He remembered, “They demanded my license, which I readily gave up, hoping that I could preach what I saw the Bible to teach instead of what some other man

## CHARTER MEMBERS

According to A.J. Tomlinson’s account, eight responded to R.G. Spurling’s invitation to sit “together as the Church of God”:

**Adeline Loftis**

**Margaret Plemons Loftis**

**John James Plemons**

**John Paul Plemons**

**Melinda Plemons**

**Mary “Polly” Plemons**

**Barbara Spurling**

**Richard Spurling**

believed....” Surrendering his license was not sufficient, however; the Pleasant Hill Church wanted to silence his voice. He continued, “I preached when impressed to do so, and I was again called to account for disobeying their rules. Now I must forever quit preaching or leave my church, so I left them, choosing to obey God rather than man. ...I was turned out of what I once thought was Christ’s only true church. What shall I do? What can I do? Oh, God, are the days of murdering Christians not over yet?”

After surrendering his preaching license in 1884, Spurling increased his study of the Scriptures and Christian history; and he began to pray for restoration of a church based solely on the New Testament. He preached whenever he had an opportunity, and often worshipped

**1876**  
R.G. Spurling marries Barbara Hamby



**1876**  
Pleasant Hill Baptist Church issues preaching credentials to R.G. Spurling

**1882**  
Richard Spurling purchases mill on Barney Creek



**1884**  
At odds with Pleasant Hill Church, R.G. Spurling surrenders Baptist preaching license

**1884**  
R.G. Spurling initiates prayer and study





# RICHARD SPURLING



Richard Spurling (1810–1891) was born in North Carolina where he lived until his family moved to Tennessee in 1822. The Clear Creek Baptist Church in Morgan County, Tennessee, likely ordained him as early as 1853, and he was active in several Baptist congregations, including establishing the Holly Springs Baptist Church in Monroe County in 1859. His son Richard Green (R.G.) was born while Richard was serving as a missionary near Williamsburg, Kentucky.

Although Richard assisted R.G., by setting the Christian Union in order, his familial and ministerial connections with the Holly Springs Church make it unlikely that he intended to stay with the infant congregation. The Holly Springs Baptist Church excluded him for joining the Christian Union, but dropped his case two months later. Richard remained active at Holly Springs until his death at the age of 81 in Anderson County, Tennessee. (Photo from Wade H. Phillips Collection)

with a nearby Methodist Church. His 1886 sermon and invitation called his hearers to return to the New Testament as the only means of bringing about Christian unity and restoration.

## *The Lost Link of Love*

Like many ministers of their time, R.G. Spurling and his father, Richard, were bi-vocational. They became millwrights and built mills throughout east Tennessee. Farmers needed neighboring grist mills to grind their grain into useable food for their families and livestock, and construction projects needed easy access to milled lumber. In 1882, Richard Spurling purchased property on Barney Creek, where the family operated grist and sawmills until Richard sold the property

in 1889. It was here that the Christian Union was set in order.

Family tradition also reports that the Spurling sawmill provided timber for the Hiwassee Loop—a nearby section of railroad track circling Bald Mountain so as to avoid expensive tunneling. During the long period of construction, what had begun as a narrow-gauge track was widened. After several years, the loop was completed in 1898, and it is likely from this experience that R.G. Spurling began to utilize railroad imagery to describe the church.

Putting his theological ideas in writing, Spurling penned a manuscript in 1897 that he later developed into a treatise published as *The Lost Link*. He

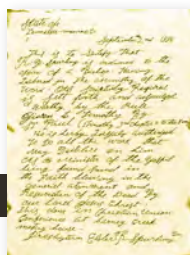
also preached on these themes at the General Assemblies meeting in January and November 1913. Spurling wrote that just as Israel had been taken into captivity for forsaking God’s law, the church too had been in captivity to spiritual Babylon for forsaking Christ’s new commandment, “that ye love one another, as I have loved you...” Spurling maintained, “love is the law upon which the Church was based, written by the Holy Ghost.”

Spurling used the metaphor of a railroad to illustrate the beginning and development of the Christian church. In Spurling’s imagery, John the Baptist was the civil engineer “who located the route by repentance and faith.” Once the route was determined, Christ laid down golden rails, which are love of God and love of neighbor. “These are the golden rails that reach all the way to heaven and upon which every wheel must roll.” Guiding the church are the drive wheels of “the law of liberty and equality,” and the Holy Ghost provides power to run the engine.

From Christian history, Spurling concluded that Satan had tempted the church with a substitute fire rather than that of the Holy Ghost. Beginning with the first Council of Nicaea in AD 325, the church abandoned the practice of allowing individuals to read, interpret, and practice the New Testament for themselves. The Council also abandoned the golden rails of love and adopted human creeds and traditions, which Spurling likened to narrow-gauge rails of wood. Although creeds were intended to communicate accepted Christian doctrine, they are always human statements. Thus, they can never substitute for the Word of God.

**1886**  
R.G. Spurling calls for reformation of the Church; Christian Union is organized

**1886**  
Richard Spurling ordains R.G. Spurling as pastor of Christian Union



**1889**  
Richard Spurling sells Barney Creek property

**Circa 1890**  
R.G. Spurling establishes a Christian Union along Shuler Creek

**1891**  
Richard Spurling dies







Some histories of the Church of God refer to father and son as R.G. Spurling Sr. and R.G. Spurling Jr. More recent histories by Wade H. Phillips and James M. Beaty reveal that they were not “Sr.” and “Jr.” in a formal sense. Only the son bore the middle name of “Green,” which came from his mother’s family. Thus, we now identify the father as Richard Spurling and the son as R.G. Spurling.

Further, our earliest account by A.J. Tomlinson records that the licensed minister, R.G. Spurling, issued the August 19, 1886, invitation to sit together as the Church of God. His father, Richard, with the authority of an ordained minister, then assisted R.G. by formally establishing the Christian Union and ordaining R.G. as the first Christian Union pastor.

Spurling’s study of Christian history proved to him that too often imperfect human creeds had been used to divide Christians and persecute others in the name of Christ. Convinced that the Councils “took out the golden link of God’s law and set in the wooden rails,” Spurling lamented the continuing divisions and lack of unity among Christians. Not only had creeds substituted for God’s law, but they had “raised a spirit of malice, strife, and persecutions. Thus, the blessed record of God’s holy church was blackened by Christians persecuting each other.” He agreed the reformers had tried to bring about a restoration of God’s church, but they too adopted creeds, which further divided the church.

For Spurling, “fellowshipping each other by the law of love is the lost link.” Describing the Christian Union’s “Basis

of Union,” he wrote, “We invite to union and fellowship all persons who avow faith in Christ and love to God and His people and a willingness to live a Christian life so as not to dishonor the cause of Christ, and we exclude only for known violations of God’s Word or commands.”

## Other Christian Union Congregations

Regrettably, few records remain from the time of the Christian Union at Barney Creek. When the Spurlings sold their Barney Creek property in 1889, the local congregation seems to have ceased to exist. Yet, the vision of Christian Union remained in the heart of R.G. Spurling, and over the next decade he established other Christian Union congregations. Wade H. Phillips uncovered much of the history of

these congregations, which is published in his book, *Quest to Restore God’s House: A Theological History of the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), Volume 1, 1886–1923.*

Having purchased a farm from his wife’s family, R.G. Spurling set in order a Christian Union along Shuler Creek near the Hiwassee River about 1890. He later relocated to Turtletown, Tennessee, in 1893, and the Christian Union at Shuler Creek likely dispersed by 1898. About that time, Spurling established a Christian Union on “Paul’s Mountain,” also known as “High Top.” He ordained Andy Paul to serve as pastor of this congregation, which survived until about 1910.

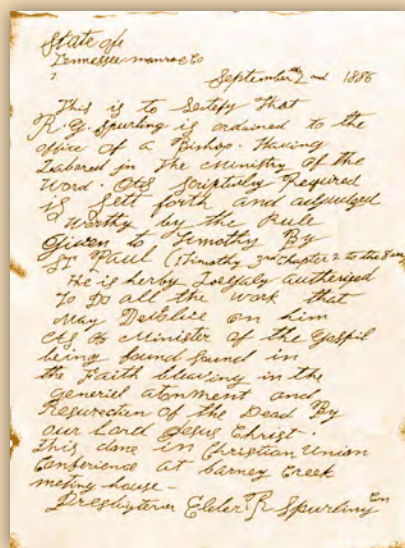
Spurling established the most successful Christian Union congregation in the community of Piney Grove, Tennessee.

**Richard Spurling** ordained his son, R.G. Spurling, as a bishop on September 2, 1886, for the purpose of R.G.’s serving as pastor of the Christian Union. Thus, while Richard was the first ordained minister, R.G. became the first pastor in the Church of God. The text reads:

*State of Tennessee, Monroe County  
September the 2nd, 1886*

*This is to certify that R.G. Spurling is ordained to the office of a Bishop. Having labored in the ministry of the Word as Scripturally required is set forth and adjudged worthy by the rule given to Timothy by St. Paul (1 Timothy 3rd chapter 2 to the 8 ver). He is hereby legally authorized to do all the work that may devolve on him as a minister of the gospel being found sound in the faith, believing in the general atonement and resurrection of the dead by our Lord Jesus Christ. This done in Christian Union Conference at Barney Creek meeting house.*

*Presbyter Elder R. Spurling*



**1893**  
R.G. Spurling relocates to Turtletown, Tenn.



**1894**  
A.J. Tomlinson and J.B. Mitchell form Book and Tract Company



**1895**  
Revival of holiness begins around Coker Creek, Tenn.

**1895**  
Benjamin Hardin Irwin experiences “baptism of fire”

**1895**  
Charles D. Tillman pens words to “Old Time Power” as prayer for sanctification in





He had been preaching there for about a decade when he organized the congregation in 1897. Many of the members of the Piney Grove Church were part of Minter Freeman's family, and Spurling ordained Minter's son, Andrew, as their pastor. Spurling also licensed Dorcus Freeman Bowers to preach—likely making her the first credentialed female minister in our



*R.G. Spurling holds the link of a railroad chain representing the lost link of love. Spurling penned a manuscript in 1897 that he later developed into The Lost Link. He believed creeds had replaced the lost link of love.*

movement. The Piney Grove Church did well with perhaps as many as 100 people attending around the turn of the century. Although Pastor Andrew Freeman attended our first General Assembly in 1906, the congregation remained independent rather than associate with the developing network of congregations under the leadership of A.J. Tomlinson. Likely due to their independent nature, Tomlinson did not include them in his telling of the Church of

God story, so they do not appear in most accounts of Church of God history.

### Characteristics of Christian Union

Although the Church of God in the twentieth century is much different than that first 1886 Christian Union, the character, commitments, and mission of those founding members remain foundational for us today.

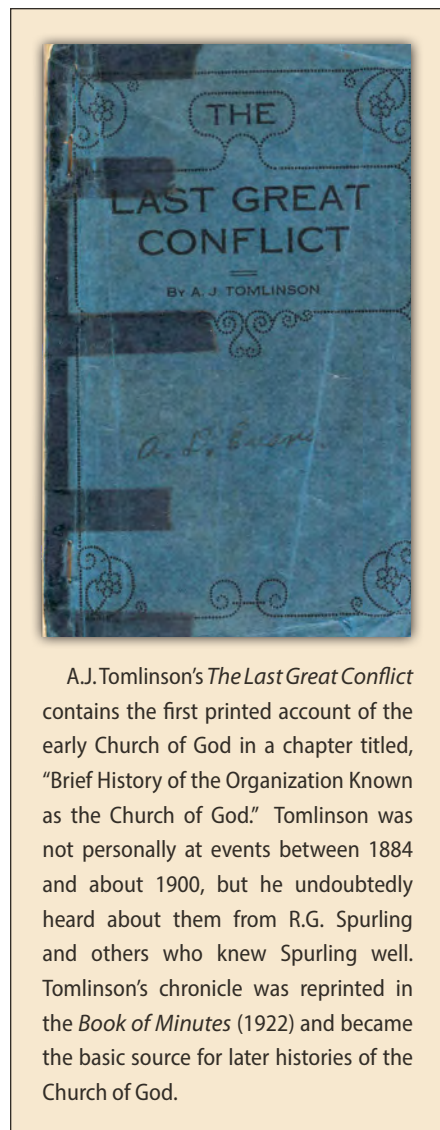
*First, they were people of "the Book."* They believed that the New Testament reveals doctrine and practice necessary for God's church in all times and places.

*Second, they valued every member.* They recognized "equal rights and privilege" to interpret the Bible, and they fully expected Spirit-led members to have insights into the Word of God that are of value to the congregation.

*Third, they committed themselves to Christian community.* By sitting together, they did not promote individual interpretations over the discernment of the Spirit-led church. When differences emerged, their covenant with one another to be God's church created opportunities for love and spiritual discernment to nurture unity rather than foster division.

*Fourth, they desired to be the Church of God.* They embraced the responsibility to search the Scriptures together for the purpose of discerning a New Testament model of being God's church. They dedicated themselves to a continuing responsibility rather than believing they already had fully achieved such restoration.

*Finally, they were committed to the Great Commission.* The ordination



A.J. Tomlinson's *The Last Great Conflict* contains the first printed account of the early Church of God in a chapter titled, "Brief History of the Organization Known as the Church of God." Tomlinson was not personally at events between 1884 and about 1900, but he undoubtedly heard about them from R.G. Spurling and others who knew Spurling well. Tomlinson's chronicle was reprinted in the *Book of Minutes* (1922) and became the basic source for later histories of the Church of God.

of R.G. Spurling acknowledged the "general atonement"—that is, Christ died for all humanity not just the elect. Establishing congregations at Shuler Creek, Piney Gove, and Paul's Mountain reveal Spurling's ongoing commitment to the gospel. Later, he encouraged W.F. Bryant and those associated with the Shearer Schoolhouse revival in North Carolina to organize a local church.

**1886**  
Holiness revival at Shearer Schoolhouse in Camp Creek, N.C.

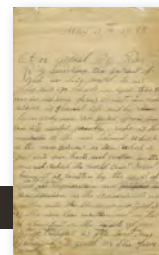
**1897**  
R.G. Spurling establishes a Christian Union at Piney Grove



**Circa 1897**  
R.G. Spurling licenses Dorcus Freeman Bowers to preach



**1897**  
R.G. Spurling drafts manuscript about the lost link of love







## Epilogue

Although many early characteristics of the Christian Union continue to shape us, the Church of God has grown and matured since our founding as Christian Union in 1886. Indebted to the vision of R.G. Spurling to restore God's church, we have expanded from the mountain congregations he planted in east Tennessee to a global Christian Movement. His life experience and worldview were shaped by Appalachian Mountain culture and nurtured by Baptist theology and church polity. Subsequently, we have embraced holiness and Pentecostal experience and theology, developed a centralized government, come to value a Declaration of Faith that affirms our essential theology, and committed ourselves to finish the Great Commission. ■

## NACE LA UNIÓN CRISTIANA

Después de dos años de estudio y oración, el exministro bautista Richard Green Spurling vio la necesidad de reformar las iglesias bautistas misioneras influenciadas por el movimiento bautista Landmark. Dado que este movimiento enseñaba que solo los bautistas de Landmark eran los únicos que pertenecían a la iglesia de Dios y que no debían asociarse con no bautistas. Sin embargo, Spurling en desacuerdo con tal teología y práctica restrictiva, sostenía que la iglesia de Dios era más amplia que aquella visión limitada. Spurling creía que a partir del Concilio de Nicea en el año 325 d. C., la iglesia había sustituido la ley del amor de Dios por credos, a la que llamó "El eslabón perdido".

El 19 de agosto de 1886, R. G. Spurling reunió a una pequeña congregación en el molino de Spurling, junto al Barney Creek, en el condado de Monroe, Tennessee. Spurling expuso "un poderoso discurso" en el que hizo hincapié en la necesidad de una reforma. Luego, hizo un llamado para establecer un nuevo movimiento cristiano al que llamaron la Unión Cristiana y tomar el Nuevo Testamento como la única regla de fe y práctica. Entre los ocho que respondieron, estuvo su padre, Richard, un anciano ministro ordenado en la Iglesia Bautista. La ordenación de Richard Spurling le dio autoridad para poner en marcha la Unión Cristiana y ordenar a su hijo R. G. Spurling como el primer pastor. R. G. Spurling plantó otras tres congregaciones de la Unión Cristiana, la cual hoy en día, continúa influyendo en la Iglesia de Dios.

## HERITAGE RESOURCES

Inspiring generations to love our Church of God heritage, Charles W. Conn published *Like a Mighty Army* in 1955. The Executive Council designated him as the first official Church Historian with publication of the second edition in 1977. Recognizing the need for resources to better understand our history, Conn established the Dixon Pentecostal Research Center on the campus of Lee University in 1971. With the continuing increase of holdings at the Dixon Pentecostal Research Center, along with accessibility of digital documents, more information about our heritage is available today than was possible in 1955. Thanks to the work of Historian Conn, this additional information continues to inform how we tell the Church of God story.



More about the early history of the Church of God can be found in these important resources:

- Beaty, James M. *R. G. Spurling and the Early History of the Church of God*. Cleveland, TN: Derek Press, 2012.
- Conn, Charles W. *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God, 1886–1996* (Tribute Edition). Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2008.
- Phillips, Wade H. *Quest to Restore God's House*. Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2014.
- Tomlinson, A. J. *The Last Great Conflict*. Reprinted, Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2011.

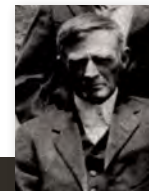
**Circa 1897**  
Holiness believers at Camp Creek experience heightened persecution

**Circa 1898**  
R.G. Spurling establishes a Christian Union on "Paul's Mountain"

**1898**  
B.H. Irwin forms Fire-Baptized Holiness Association



**Circa 1898**  
Billy Martin introduces Fire-Baptized Movement and religious excesses to Camp Creek



**Circa 1898**  
Holiness believers at Camp Creek experience speaking in tongues





*W.F. Bryant family ca. 1905. Back row from left: Agnes, Winnie, Luther, Frank Roberson [Robinson], Julius. Front row from left: Lowell, W.F. Bryant, Nora, Nettie holding Ernest, Ella Bryant Robinson holding Olen Robinson (Wade H. Phillips Collection)*

# A REVIVAL OF HOLINESS

*“At this time I was a member of the Baptist church and none of us believed in sanctification although I attended this revival. I noticed how those who claimed sanctification would go to their fellowmen and fix everything right, making their confession to one another.... In 1896 I began seeking God definitely for an experience I had never attained to. The spirit within me would cry out, ‘Give me the blessing like those other few have received.’ ...When I got all on the altar, one Thursday morning about 9:00 o’clock, I was sanctified while sitting in my saddle on my horse.”*

W. F. “Will” Bryant  
*The Faithful Standard*

As the nineteenth century neared its sunset, a revival of holiness came to southeastern Tennessee and southwestern North Carolina. The sparse population on both sides of the state line supported few schools and little law enforcement, but it was kept somewhat in order by the scattered churches throughout the rural communities. One commentator described the region as “a moonshine country; most of the men toted guns, most of the women used snuff.” The majority of churches were Missionary Baptist with a scattering of Methodists. Although many of the people were “churched,” they typically had services only once or twice a month; and

a lifestyle of holiness was virtually unknown among congregations where the preacher might “spit amber during his sermon.”

A renewed emphasis on holiness began around Coker Creek, Tennessee, by May 1895. Hungry for a deeper experience with God, William Martin, Joseph Tipton, and others began to pray, fast, and hold home meetings. The Spirit of God moved so powerfully that critics suggested they were going mad. Church committees tried to dissuade them, but they would not deny their newfound experience. After studying the Scriptures, they testified “boldly that they were sanctified

**1899**  
A.J. Tomlinson moves to Culberson, N.C. as home missionary



**1900**  
Mob of 106 dismantles and burns Holiness meeting house at Camp Creek

**1900**  
A.J. Tomlinson begins orphanage and school in Culberson, N.C.

**1901**  
Tomlinson publishes *Samson's Foxes* to promote ministry



**1902**  
R.G. Spurling and R. Frank Porter set in order the Holiness Church at Camp Creek, N.C., in Bryant's home; Spurling is pastor





and living a life above sin. They claimed to have the Holy Ghost, but they had not yet spoken in tongues.”



Methodist minister William “Billy” Martin experienced sanctification in Coker Creek, Tennessee, in 1895. He led the Holiness revival at Shearer Schoolhouse in 1896 and later introduced the Fire-Baptized Movement to the Camp Creek community. (Wade H. Phillips Collection)

The observation that they “claimed to have the Holy Ghost, but they had not yet spoken in tongues” likely reflected the theological link between the Holy Spirit and sanctification that was a dominant feature of the American Holiness Movement. Looking for a biblical pattern, many in the Holiness Movement identified their sanctification experience with the Acts 2 Baptism with the Holy Ghost. They sang hymns such as “The Comforter Has Come,” published songbooks such as *Pentecostal Hymns*, and even used the word “Pentecostal” in church names such as the Pentecostal Holiness Church of North Carolina.

These holiness believers considered speaking with other tongues in Acts 2 as

Spirit-empowered proclamation of the gospel rather than glossolalia. Although there were occasional testimonies of what we now believe was speaking in tongues, they were not teaching the later Pentecostal theology of tongues as initial evidence of Spirit baptism. They likely saw the experience of speaking in tongues as one of numerous manifestations of the Spirit, such as shouting, dancing, and shaking.

Yet, this renewed emphasis on sanctification encouraged seeking God for an outpouring of the Spirit. As an illustration, in 1895, songwriter Charles D. Tillman penned the words to “Old Time Power.” What later became a Pentecostal anthem was written as a prayer for sanctification.

*They were in an upper chamber,  
They were all with one accord,  
When the Holy Ghost descended,  
As was promised by the Lord.*

*Chorus  
O Lord, send the pow'r just now,  
O Lord, send the pow'r just now,  
O Lord, send the pow'r just now,  
And baptize ev'ry one.*

*Yes, this pow'r from heav'n descended,  
With the sound of rushing wind;  
Tongues of fire came down upon them,  
As the Lord said He would send.*

*Yes, this "old-time" pow'r was given  
To our fathers who were true;  
This is promised to believers,  
And we all may have it too.  
[Public Domain]*

Looking back, we rejoice that when seekers prayed “O Lord send the power,” God answered their prayers and poured out the Holy Spirit in new and fresh ways. Yet, their use of Acts 2 to describe their sanctification experiences challenges historians to know with certainty whether various testimonies were referring to sanctification or to our later Pentecostal understanding of Spirit baptism.

## Revival at Shearer Schoolhouse

Emboldened by their sanctification experience, William Martin and Joseph Tipton, joined by William Hamby and Milton McNabb, began to minister beyond Coker Creek. In the spring of 1896, they preached a ten-day revival at the Shearer Schoolhouse in the North Carolina community of Camp Creek.

## A MORE COMPLETE TIMELINE

Precise dating of revival events remains challenging. Eyewitness reports are inconsistent because they are reported much later and dependent on imperfect memories. The sparse records from the time often differ from these later eyewitness testimonies. In recent years, newly discovered documents, such as Baptist church records, provide some clarity to the likely sequence of events. A more comprehensive timeline is found in Wade H. Phillips, *The Quest to Restore God's House* (page 116):

- Shearer Schoolhouse revival: Spring 1896
- Formation of Holiness band: 1896–1897
- Persecutions: 1897–1903
- Fire-Baptized influence: 1898–1901
- Exclusions from churches: 1898–1901
- Holiness Church established: May 15, 1902

**1903**  
Tomlinson joins Holiness Church at Camp Creek; becomes pastor

**1904**  
Tomlinson and M.S. Lemons publish *The Way*

**1904**  
Tomlinson becomes pastor of three former Fire-Baptized churches in Tennessee

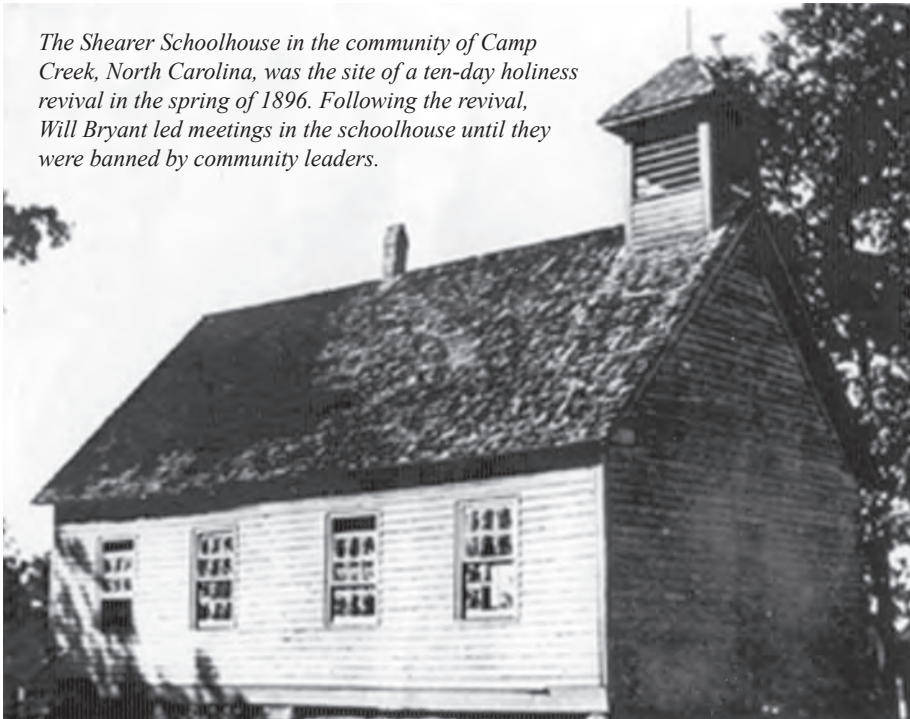


**1904**  
Tomlinson's family relocates to Cleveland, Tenn.





*The Shearer Schoolhouse in the community of Camp Creek, North Carolina, was the site of a ten-day holiness revival in the spring of 1896. Following the revival, Will Bryant led meetings in the schoolhouse until they were banned by community leaders.*



William Hamby was the brother-in-law of R.G. Spurling, and Milton McNabb was the cousin of nearby farmer, Will Bryant.

The evangelists proclaimed the necessity of holiness and called for their hearers to seek sanctification. They were “given to much prayer and fasting,” preached earnestly, and throngs of people responded. Church of God Historian Charles W. Conn wrote, “Almost from the start of the meeting, the altars were filled with repentant sinners and seekers for the experience of sanctification. Many skeptics of holiness were convinced, and many more rough-living sinners were converted.”

William Franklin Bryant Jr. (1863–1949) attended the revival. Known as “Will” by his family and friends, Bryant was a bootlegger, farmer, and faithful

member of the Liberty Baptist Church. He married Brunetty (Nettie) Anderson (1863–1960), and they had nine children. Having testified of salvation at the age of fourteen, Bryant struggled with his sinful nature and found little solace from his pastor. This is not surprising as Baptists typically believed a person was simultaneously a saint and a sinner, so that one can only live a godly life through personal discipline. Failure was tolerated as long as one did not sin too publicly.

Observing the revival at the schoolhouse, Bryant was amazed when those claiming sanctification went to people they had wronged and made their relationships right. He began to seek God for the same experience in his own life. When the revival concluded, Bryant began leading Sunday school and worship

services in homes and at the Shearer Schoolhouse. Over the next three years, this Baptist layman became shepherd to a flock of about fifty holiness believers. They did not consider themselves an organized church as most remained members of nearby Baptist congregations.

The ten-day revival at the Shearer Schoolhouse in the spring of 1896 inaugurated a spirit of revival that lasted for several years among those who testified of sanctification. This protracted revival intensified about 1898 with the spread of the Fire-Baptized Movement among the holiness believers.



*B.H. Irwin, with son Vidalin, taught a “third blessing” called “the fire.” He established the Fire-Baptized Holiness Association in Anderson, South Carolina, in 1898. This movement influenced many holiness believers, including those in Camp Creek.*

### Fire-Baptized Movement

Established by Benjamin Hardin Irwin (1854–ca.1926), the Fire-Baptized Holiness Movement quickly grew among

**1905**  
Church is established in Georgia at home of Rufus Jones



**1906**  
First Assembly meets January 26–27 at Camp Creek, N.C.; emphasizes evangelism



**1906**  
Melissa Murphy speaks about Sunday schools at first Assembly



**1906**  
Outpouring of Holy Spirit on Azusa Street in Los Angeles





## DECLINE OF THE FIRE-BAPTIZED MOVEMENT

Most holiness proponents rejected Irwin's additional spiritual baptisms, but the concept of a post-sanctification experience that provided spiritual power influenced many who later adopted Pentecostal theology. Irwin was especially successful in east Tennessee, including at Beniah, a small community located along the railroad between Cleveland and Charleston. Friends of Irwin donated property in Beniah to establish a School of the Prophets, which might have made Bradley County the headquarters of the movement. But in 1900, Irwin was found to have sinned egregiously, and the Fire-Baptized Movement rapidly collapsed. Those remaining became part of the Pentecostal Holiness Church in 1911. Spiritual descendants of Irwin include the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, the Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God of the Americas, the Fire Baptized Holiness Church, and Fire Baptized Holiness Church (Wesleyan).

holiness believers. Highlighting John the Baptist's prophecy that One was coming who would "baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire" (Matthew 3:11), Irwin experienced what he called a "baptism of fire" in 1895. He then began teaching a "third blessing" following justification and sanctification called "the Holy Ghost and fire." "The fire" was often accompanied by shouting, dancing, an inward bodily feeling of fire, and even reports of seeing balls of fire. Some also testified of speaking in tongues. After organizing in several states, leaders of the movement met in Anderson, South Carolina, in August 1898, and formed the Fire-Baptized Holiness Association.

The Fire-Baptized Movement emphasized divine healing, taught a strict holiness lifestyle, including no neckties for men, and restoration of various Old Testament dietary laws such as abstaining from unclean meat. Critics referred to them as the "no-hog-meat, no neck-tie people." Convinced they were living in the last days, they continually sought for more of God's power, especially to enable evangelization, and they prayed for subsequent deeper, spiritual experiences. When they received experiences not named in Scripture, they turned to scientific and pseudo-scientific language. Intensifying "the fire," they testified of baptisms of dynamite, lyddite, oxidite, and selenite.

William Martin, Joseph Tipton, Milton McNabb and others who had led the early holiness meetings at Camp Creek became part of the Fire-Baptized Movement. Bryant later reported that "William Martin . . . came back teaching

the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, I received that blessing also." Martin's ministry about 1898 or 1899 likely initiated the outpouring of the Holy Spirit chronicled by A.J. Tomlinson in *The Last Great Conflict*. Tomlinson wrote, "The people earnestly sought God, and the interest increased until unexpectedly, like a cloud from a clear sky, the Holy Ghost began to fall on the honest, humble, sincere seekers after God. . . . [O]ne after another fell under the power of God, and soon quite a number were speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." Tomlinson continued, "The power of healing was soon realized, and a number of miraculous cases of healings were wrought by the power of God."

The Lord had done an extraordinary work in the lives of the Camp Creek holiness believers. Despite the remoteness of their mountain community, God poured

## UN AVIVAMIENTO DE SANTIDAD EN CAMP CREEK, CAROLINA DEL NORTE

Un avivamiento de santidad comenzó al este de Tennessee y al oeste de Carolina del Norte a finales del siglo XIX. Una de sus características fue equiparar la santificación con el bautismo del Espíritu según Hechos 2. Este avivamiento llegó a Camp Creek en 1896 cuando cuatro evangelistas predicaron en la escuela Shearer. Will Bryant y otros experimentaron la santificación, y Bryant se convirtió en pastor de un rebaño de unos cincuenta creyentes en la santidad.

El movimiento de los Bautizados por el Fuego fundado por B.H. Irwin enfatizaba las palabras de Juan el Bautista de que vendría uno que "os bautizaría con el Espíritu Santo y con fuego" (Mateo 3:11). Irwin enseñó una tercera bendición llamada "el fuego". Algunos también hablaban en lenguas, incluyendo a William Martin quien trajo el movimiento de los Bautizados en Fuego a Camp Creek alrededor de 1898. A.J. Tomlinson escribió: "[U]no tras otro cayó bajo el poder de Dios, y en seguida un gran número hablaban en otras lenguas según el Espíritu les daba que hablasen".

Las iglesias Bautistas Misioneras persiguieron a los creyentes de la santidad. R.G. Spurling animó al rebaño de santidad a organizar una iglesia, lo que hicieron el 15 de mayo de 1902, con Spurling como pastor. Se llamaron a sí mismos la Iglesia de la Santidad en Camp Creek.

**1906**  
North  
Cleveland  
Church of God  
is established



**1907**  
Assembly adopts  
name Church of  
God; approves  
Evangelist's License



**1907**  
A.J. Tomlinson hears  
of Spirit baptism  
with tongues as  
Bible evidence;  
seeks experience

**1908**  
Cleveland, Tenn.  
church hosts  
Assembly for  
first time





Ross and Emeline Allen Family ca. 1902. Emeline is seated left, and Ross is seated center. (Wade H. Phillips Collection)

out His Spirit and Will Bryant and the Church of God were forever changed. Yet, according to Historian Conn, it would be some time later before they “would understand the doctrine, person, and nature of the Holy Spirit.”

**Persecution**

The Missionary Baptist churches in and around Camp Creek already opposed the teaching of sanctification, and the introduction of Fire-Baptized theology and experience along with their religious excesses exacerbated the harassment and persecution inflicted on the Holiness flock. Bryant recalled, “A church committee waited on my wife, my daughter, and myself for claiming to live a life above sin and being baptized with the Holy Ghost and fire.” The holiness believers were banned from using the schoolhouse; their wells were polluted,

along with other acts of vandalism; and they were shot at and beaten. According to Baptist church records, forty were turned out of the Liberty and Pleasant Hill Churches for teaching erroneous doctrines, including sanctification.

The Holiness band worshipped in homes, as well as a small building Bryant constructed on his property. One evening about twenty-five armed and masked “Night Caps” appeared at the home of Ross and Emeline Allen where holiness believers were worshipping. The mob demanded that the worship stop, or people would be beaten, and their homes burned. This was not an idle threat. Enemies already had burned some of their homes.

The petite Emeline Allen went out to greet the mob and invited them to

come inside. Becoming angrier and more boisterous, they refused. Emeline replied with kindness that the worshippers would not stop the meetings until God was finished with them. She countered their threats, “Why don’t you take off that garb and let me fix a meal for you. There’s no cause to hide behind masks when I know every one of you. You are our neighbors. . . . If you take off your garb, I’ll fix you a good meal.” Whether due to Emeline’s boldness or her kindness, the mob slowly disbursed into the darkness.

A sympathetic landowner, Dickson Kilpatrick, gave the Holiness band property near the school to build a house of worship. When enemies tried to burn the meetinghouse, rain put out the fire. When they attempted to destroy it with dynamite, that too failed. In 1900, 106 leading members of the community dismantled the meetinghouse and burned the logs. This blatant vandalism might have led to their being jailed, except that Will Bryant asked the court to forgive them.

On another occasion, Nettie Bryant and her children were stopped at a creek by an angry man brandishing a shotgun. “Yo’all go back! Old Sankey ain’t never gonna cross this crick,” he shouted. “Old Sankey” was a derisive term for those testifying of sanctification. With little else a mother and young children could do, they prayed and returned home. Decades later, one of the children who was there that day, Julius Bryant, asked Charles Conn about the expansion of the Church of God. Did the Church of God now reach around the world? When Conn affirmed “yes,” Julius Bryant responded with teary eyes, “I guess we crossed the creek after all.”

**1908**  
G.B. Cashwell preaches at Assembly; Tomlinson is baptized with the Spirit

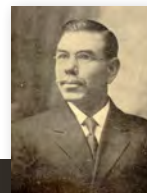


**1908**  
F.J. Lee comes into the Church during ten-week fall revival



**1909**  
Assembly approves office of general moderator; later renamed general overseer

**1909**  
Assembly elects Tomlinson as general moderator (overseer)



**1909**  
Assembly provides Evangelist’s License to women

**1909**  
Congregations are established in Alabama and Florida

## Responding to Violence

As leader of the Holiness band, Will Bryant considered it vital to respond to violence with love. He recalled, “We lay on our faces and cried to God to keep us sweet and let us do nothing to grieve the Holy Ghost . . . [and] we asked for the signs to follow us more and more.”

A short time later, the Spirit woke Bryant at 2:00 a.m. He agonized in prayer the remainder of the night and was unable to eat the next morning. While he sat at the breakfast table, a man knocked at the door. The caller’s brother lay sick with typhoid fever and desperately needed prayer. Bryant hurried to the man’s home and later testified, “The Holy Ghost fell upon me. We rebuked the fever in the name of Jesus Christ, laid our hands upon him, and anointed him with oil. This poor man sprang up in the bed, screaming at the top of his voice, saying, ‘Oh, mother, mother, God has healed me and saved my soul.’”

For Bryant, this miracle of salvation and healing was a God-given sign to their persecutors. Instead of malice, the sanctified and Spirit-filled believers offered hope and the power of God to the world around them.

## The Holiness Church

Living four miles away near Turtle-town, Tennessee, R.G. Spurling regularly visited the Holiness band at Camp Creek. He observed how the religious excesses of the Fire-Baptized Movement, continuing persecution, and a lack of pastoral leadership had scattered many. As the number of faithful dwindled, Spurling encouraged Bryant to set in order a church. Yet, having



*This mountain cabin is believed to be W.F. Bryant’s home where the Holiness Church at Camp Creek was set in order on May 15, 1902.*

experienced the pain of being excluded from their churches, the holiness believers were reluctant to join another church.

Bryant later remembered, “Brother Spurling kept coming to me and saying, ‘Let’s set a church in order.’ I didn’t much want to. I said, ‘Look at the Baptists and Methodists. All they have had is confusion.’” Bryant continued, “We kept going on for a while, but he came back and said, ‘Let’s set a church in order. We need it.’ I decided we could get along better if we had a church set in order. People kept coming and causing trouble, and we decided we could do better if we set the church in order.”

Under the leadership of Spurling and R. Frank Porter, who had been appointed Tennessee’s Ruling Elder for the Fire-Baptized Movement in 1899, sixteen people covenanted together as a church in Bryant’s home on May 15, 1902. They had

experienced revival, the power of the Holy Spirit, the confusion of religious excesses, and the ravages of persecution. Absolutely convinced of the necessity of sanctification, they named themselves the Holiness Church. Recognizing his spiritual authority, they chose R.G. Spurling as their pastor. According to Tomlinson’s account of these events, they considered themselves to be a continuation of the movement Spurling had begun as the Christian Union in 1886. ■

## HERITAGE RESOURCES

- “History of Pentecost.” *The Faithful Standard*, September 1922, 5-6, 20.
- Synan, Vinson and Daniel Woods. *Fire Baptized: The Many Lives and Works of Benjamin Harding Irwin*. Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2017.

**1909**  
Tomlinson preaches at Pleasant Grove Camp Meeting in Durant, Fla.



**1909**  
Edmond and Rebecca Barr become first Black ministers in Church



**1909**  
Barrs travel to Bahamas; Rebecca becomes first missionary



**1910**  
R.M. and Ida Evans with Carl Padgett arrive in Bahamas

**1910**  
*Church of God Evangel* is published; Tomlinson is editor







*A.J. Tomlinson Family not long before their move to North Carolina in 1899. From left: Homer; Ambrose, Haley, Mary Jane, Iris. (Wade H. Phillips Collection)*

# A TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER

*“I was ordained a minister of the gospel of the Holiness Church at Camp Creek, N.C.”*

A.J. Tomlinson  
June 13, 1903

The Holiness Church at Camp Creek saw little progress in the months following its establishment in May 1902. The congregation continued to experience opposition from its neighbors. There was one interested friend and observer, however. Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson (1865–1943) resided about fourteen miles east in the hamlet of Culberson, North Carolina.

He had become friends with Will Bryant, R.G. Spurling, and the Holiness Church, and he cast his lot with the congregation on June 13, 1903.

One of the great stories of the biblical record is that of Abraham—a man who left his home, journeyed to a new land, and fathered a great nation. Hebrews 11:10 records that Abraham “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” A.J. Tomlinson lived his early life searching for God’s church. Believing he had found the true church in

Camp Creek, he exhausted his remaining years endeavoring to build God’s church. His leadership transformed the Church of God from a mountain congregation to a global ministry.

## Missionary From Indiana

A.J. Tomlinson was born into a nominal Quaker family near the central Indiana community of Westfield. According to family tradition, he was anemic at birth but full of energy throughout his life. An excellent student, he concentrated on athletics and drama in high school. As a

**1910**  
Arcadia, Fla. church gives first offering for world missions

**1910**  
Sam C. Perry visits Cuba



**1910**  
Formulated for ministerial candidates—Church Teachings are published in *Evangel*

**1910**  
J.W. Buckalew establishes church in Alabama City



**1910**  
First established in 1902, Kimberly, Ala., church comes into the Church of God





young adult, he became consumed with politics, including running for a local office on the People's Party ticket, often referred to as the Populist Party. Then, on April 24, 1889, he married Mary Jane Taylor, and they had four children: Halcy, Homer, Iris, and Milton.

Tomlinson's grandparents, Robert and Lydia Tomlinson, were devout Quakers. They denounced war and capital punishment and were staunch abolitionists. They also were publicly known as "operators" on the Underground Railroad—a network of people and places assisting escaped slaves make their way to freedom in Canada. Lydia so opposed slavery that she refused to purchase products produced by slave labor.

Tomlinson's parents, Milton and Delilah, were estranged from the Society of Friends due in part to their marriage in a courthouse rather than a Quaker meetinghouse. Along with farming, they were entrepreneurs well-known for enterprises such as building roads for highways and railroads.

Despite growing up in a nominally religious family, A.J. later recalled central moments in his spiritual journey. At the age of twelve, he heard his name called three times—not his birth name but rather the nickname given by his family. Then, at seventeen, his spiritual nature was stirred during a local revival. His friends pleaded with him to be saved, but he refused to yield.

As a twenty-four-year-old groom, fear from a nearby lightning strike provoked Tomlinson to reconsider his relationship

with God, so he began reading the Bible and praying. Soon converted, he burned his playing cards and became involved in Sunday school work at the nearby Chester Preparative Meeting of the Society of Friends, which was evangelical and what biographer R.G. Robins described as "the epicenter of Quaker holiness in America." The absence of a preacher during a scheduled revival created an opportunity for lay preaching, and this became a pattern throughout Tomlinson's life. When a need presented itself, he responded wholeheartedly and energetically. About 1892, Tomlinson experienced a dramatic sanctification, which he described as "the last great conflict."

### Ministry in North Carolina

Tomlinson soon became acquainted with J.B. Mitchell—a convert of Charles Finney. Finney was a leading evangelist of

America's Second Great Awakening and had founded Oberlin College in Ohio. Oberlin was one of the early colleges to allow women to sit in the same classroom as men, and its ideas concerning sanctification, missions, and distribution of clothing and Bibles to the poor greatly influenced Mitchell, who influenced Tomlinson. Ever the entrepreneur, in 1894, Tomlinson and Mitchell formed the Book and Tract Company as a means of funding ministry, including travel to the mountains of southern Appalachia.

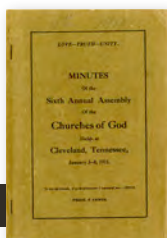
Tomlinson was already sensing a spiritual awareness that God was calling him to lead others in ministry. After several trips south, his interest in evangelism and ministry to the poor brought him to Culberson, North Carolina, a small village near Murphy and just north of the Georgia state line. He wrote in his diary on May 8, 1899, "We



*Tomlinson with family and friends at Culberson ca. 1900. Mary Jane and A.J. Tomlinson seated center; Miles Dickson Kilpatrick ("Uncle Dick") seated in buggy; J.B. Mitchell standing right. (Wade H. Phillips Collection)*

**1910**  
Church is organized in Kentucky

**1911**  
Assembly adopts Church Teachings—now Doctrinal Commitments



**1911**  
First missions offering at an Assembly totals \$21.05

**1911**  
Assembly creates office of state overseer to conduct "general evangelistic campaign"

**1911**  
Lillian Trasher founds orphanage in Egypt







*Tomlinson's ministry at Culberson ca. 1901. A.J. Tomlinson (with beard) is standing left of Mary Jane Tomlinson on back row.*

are waiting here in Ohio for God to give us the money to go to the mission fields in the mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee." He and his family arrived in Culberson on October 16, 1899.

Tomlinson patterned his Culberson ministry after other Quaker home mission ministries to the southern poor. He developed a Sunday school, an industrial school for children, an orphanage, and a clothing distribution center. First renting a house for the ministry, he later purchased a two-acre lot that he deeded to "God Almighty and A.J. Tomlinson, steward or agent." At least through 1908, Tomlinson occasionally sent "Missionary Evangelism" letters to supporters around the country soliciting aid for the Culberson ministry. In those letters, he identified himself as a missionary to the impoverished and unreached in east Tennessee, north Georgia, and western North Carolina.

As a means of promoting the work in Culberson, Tomlinson published a monthly paper called *Samson's Foxes*. It featured articles and news from the Holiness and Divine Healing Movements and appealed for help for the mountain poor. Tomlinson believed that just as Samson's foxes had burned the fields of the Philistines, the ministry of converted children would burn sin out of the mountains. Later in 1904, Tomlinson and his friend M.S. Lemons began publishing *The Way* with the motto, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

With few resources and outside support, Tomlinson's ministry in Culberson teetered on the verge of financial failure. Many days began wondering from where the day's food for the children would come. Also challenging, the ministry soon experienced local opposition. Viewed as a Yankee outsider, Tomlinson's

stern sanctification message and printed characterization of the "poor ignorant whites" generated hostilities from neighbors. Ridiculed, threatened, and even challenged to a duel with pistols, he heard the Holy Spirit whisper "depart," and he left for six weeks to allow tempers to cool.

Having already explored numerous denominations and movements, while away from Culberson, Tomlinson revisited Frank W. Sanford's "Shiloh" near Durham, Maine. According to Cecil M. Robeck, Sanford (1862–1948) was an "author, publisher, pastor, evangelist, Bible school founder and utopian visionary who played a pivotal role in the training of many Holiness people who would later become Pentecostal..." Sanford edited a periodical called *Tongues of Fire* and preached that signs and wonders would separate those belonging to Christ from those belonging to Anti-Christ. He called for the restoration of apostolic life and power and emphasized missions, faith, and divine healing.

Tomlinson previously had attended Sanford's Holy Ghost and Us Bible School in 1897 and had been baptized in the Androscoggin River. Water baptism demonstrated a radical break from his Quaker roots. During this second visit, Sanford himself baptized Tomlinson as entry into the "Church of the Living God," established "for the Evangelization of the World, Gathering of Israel, and the New Order of Things at the Close of the Gentile Nation."

Returning to Culberson, Tomlinson steadily distanced himself from Sanford, whose theology became more and more

**1911**  
Pentecostal  
World-wide  
Mission Band  
travels to  
Bahamas



**1911**  
First Spanish-  
language church  
joins Church of  
God in Raton,  
N.M.

**1911**  
Edmond Barr  
organizes Black  
congregation in  
Miami

**1911**  
W.F. Bryant supervises a  
short-lived orphanage in  
Cleveland, Tenn.





Tomlinson published Samson's Foxes in 1901 and 1902 to promote the Culberson ministry. Some contents led to hostilities among his neighbors.

radical. Clearly Sandford's church was not truly God's church. Yet, Sandford's message of living in the last days and the necessity of uncovering God's church before the soon return of Jesus Christ were indelibly integrated into Tomlinson's theology.

### The Holiness Church

On one of his trips through the North Carolina mountains, Tomlinson's ministry and spiritual journey led him to Camp Creek. Tomlinson had stopped his wagon at Shoal Creek to allow his horses a refreshing drink. Noticing two boys nearby, the Bible colporteur sold each of them a five-cent New Testament. As Homer Tomlinson recounted the story, one of those boys, Luther Bryant, invited Tomlinson to his home. "Ye ort to meet my pa. He's pow'ful religious." That day Tomlinson encountered Will Bryant and began a relationship with the Holiness band that would change his life.

Tomlinson observed the Holiness flock for several years. He later wrote in *Answering the Call of God*, "I had already searched and investigated many movements until my faith in them had completely exhausted. I seemed to be like a ship at sea with no rudder by which it should be controlled." With the imperfections of human organizations, he had yet to discover a church that measured up to his ideal. Cautious of church government, he wrote to Bryant warning about the dangers of organization, but Bryant heeded the advice of R.G. Spurling rather than that of Tomlinson.

Following the organization of the Holiness Church on May 15, 1902, Tomlinson often visited the congregation. Fellowship, Bible study, and deepening relationships altered his understanding toward Spurling's belief that the church must be local and visible. After prayer on the morning of Saturday, June 13, 1903, Tomlinson covenanted with the Holiness Church believing it was the "Church of God of the Bible." He later recalled that prior to joining, he declared, "If you take the whole Bible rightly divided, that makes it the Church of God." With their confirmation, he united with the Holiness Church, and they immediately ordained him as their pastor.

We should note here that Tomlinson later asserted that the Church of God had been covered over until his June 13, 1903, revelation. Yet, his "Brief History" recorded in *The Last Great Conflict*, connected the Church of God back to the founding of the Christian Union on August 19, 1886. Because of Tomlinson's later claim that the Church of God was revealed on June 13, 1903, some of his ecclesiastical descendants celebrate June 13, 1903, as

the beginning of the Church of God this side of the Dark Ages.

### Cleveland, Tennessee

Tomlinson's ministry in Culberson continued to struggle as he increasingly ministered beyond the mountains. In December 1904, the Tomlinson family relocated from Culberson to Cleveland, Tennessee. In a previous visit to the small town of about 4,500 people, he had purchased a house on Gaut Street. He was able to afford the house in part because tales that it was haunted had dissuaded other buyers.

Why Cleveland, Tennessee? The growing valley town sixty miles west of Culberson was attractive to a minister with a vision to expand God's church. Improvements in Cleveland included waterworks, electricity, a volunteer fire department, and a telephone system. Good schools were particularly essential for a growing family, and Cleveland was building a public school system to replace its one-room schoolhouses.

## CLEVELAND AND THE RAILROAD

Regarding the significance of the railroad, on June 30, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln said, "To take and hold the railroad at or east of Cleveland, Tennessee, I think is as fully as important as the taking and holding of Richmond." Why was the railroad near Cleveland of such importance? Copper was mined in Ducktown and Copper Hill, brought to Cleveland by ox wagon, and smelted to provide ammunition for the Confederacy.

**1912**  
Tomlinson ordains Edmond Barr as first Black bishop



**1912**  
Church is organized in Illinois, Mississippi, and New Mexico

**1913**  
Assembly changes meeting date from January to November

**1913**  
Assembly appoints F.J. Lee general treasurer for foreign missions

**1913**  
Church is organized on Green Turtle Cay, Bahamas; now oldest church outside USA





## UN LÍDER TRANSFORMACIONAL

A.J. Tomlinson se unió a la Iglesia de la Santidad en Camp Creek el 13 de junio de 1903. Nació en una familia de granjeros cuáqueros de Indiana en 1865, y se convirtió tras caerle un rayo cerca. En 1894, fundó la compañía Book and Tract Company con J.B. Mitchel para proveer apoyo financiero al ministerio de los pobres de las montañas del oeste de Carolina del Norte.

Luego de haber sido trasladado a Culberson, Carolina del Norte, el ministerio de Tomlinson incluía una escuela para niños, una escuela dominical, distribución de ropa y un orfanato. El ministerio experimentó dificultades financieras, y su mensaje de santificación y el trato que daba a los pobres de las montañas generaron hostilidades por parte de la población local.

El viaje espiritual de Tomlinson lo llevó a la banda de santidad en Camp Creek, y se hizo buen amigo de Will Bryant. Después de orar el sábado 13 de junio de 1903, Tomlinson se unió a la Iglesia de Santidad con el entendimiento de que era la "Iglesia de Dios de la Biblia".

En diciembre de 1904, Tomlinson se trasladó a Cleveland, Tennessee, donde había buenas escuelas para sus hijos, un ferrocarril para viajar más fácilmente e iglesias cercanas que lo invitaron a servir como su pastor. En 1906 moderó la primera Asamblea General y estableció lo que hoy es la Iglesia de Dios del Norte de Cleveland.

One very valuable resource was the Southern Railway Company that connected Cleveland to cities such as Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Atlanta. Like an airport today, a train station provided possibilities of quick and inexpensive travel. The alternatives were walking, horseback, or horse and buggy. There were few roads and only the privileged could afford automobiles. The same railroad that made the growth of business and industry possible also cultivated a vision of world evangelism.

Perhaps the opportunity that most influenced Tomlinson's relocation to Cleveland was the surrounding fertile field for ministry. In December 1903, he accepted pastorates of nearby Tennessee congregations in Luskville and Union Grove. Drygo was added to his responsibilities by the end of 1904. These had been Fire-Baptized churches prior to the fall of Irwin. Still serving at Camp Creek, Tomlinson was pastor of a circuit of congregations.

Tomlinson's journal reveals that by December 21 he was making use of his home office in Cleveland. In addition to serving as a base for pastoral and evangelistic ministry, his office provided space for his prolific correspondence and publication of *The Way*. It was a significant step forward for what was to become a worldwide movement based in Cleveland, Tennessee.

### Need for an Assembly

As 1905 came to an end, Tomlinson was pastoring his circuit of congregations and endeavoring to establish a mission in Cleveland. A new congregation had been planted near Morganton, Georgia, which met in the home of the Jones family, and through R.G. Spurling there was continued fellowship with the Piney Grove and Paul's Mountain Christian Unions. According to Tomlinson, the work of these churches had "so prospered that there began to be a

demand for a general gathering together of members from all the churches to consider questions of importance and to search the Bible for additional light and knowledge." He later remembered, "We were walking softly, carefully, and prayerfully before God, as we have been up to this very day, determined to track the Bible and not go beyond in any of our teachings and practices, and at the same time advance as light was given." When examining the Scriptures, it seemed evident that Israel's meetings in the wilderness and the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 were clear biblical examples justifying a meeting of the churches.



*Tomlinson working at his home in Cleveland, Tennessee. The desk was moved outside for the photograph.*

Twenty-one women and men gathered on Friday and Saturday, January 26 and 27, 1906. None of the congregations owned a church building, so they met in the home of J.C. and Melissa Shearer Murphy in Camp Creek. Without good roads or an automobile, the fifty miles from Cleveland was a two-day journey for Pastor Tomlinson.

Not surprisingly, the delegates selected Pastor A.J. Tomlinson to serve as moderator and clerk. After he called the delegates to order and conducted devotions,

**1913**  
Church is organized in West Virginia, Colorado, and California

**1914**  
Florida dedicates first Church of God camp meeting tabernacle in Wimauma, Fla.



**1914**  
Assembly names Tomlinson general overseer "until God takes him away"

**1914**  
Roy and Jennie Rushin travel to China





their first action was to adopt a motto: “We do not consider ourselves a legislative or executive body, but judicial only.” By this they meant that it was not the purpose of their Assembly to make God’s laws or to implement God’s laws; rather, God’s laws are revealed in the New Testament, interpreted by the Assembly, and implemented by local congregations. Delegates discussed various issues, came to a consensus, recommended their conclusions to the local churches, and agreed to meet again the next year.

When their business was completed, they employed the language of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:25 with an affirmation of spiritual discernment and unity. “It seemeth good to the Holy Ghost and us, being assembled together with one accord, with the Spirit of Christ in the midst, and after much prayer, discussion, searching the Scriptures and counsel, to recommend these necessary things and that they be ratified and observed by all the local churches.”

The winter weather had been so cold that J.C. Murphy continually put logs in the fireplace to keep the delegates warm; and on Saturday evening, a fierce snowstorm rendered travel difficult. Delegates who remained for worship on Sunday heeded the Assembly and participated in the Lord’s Supper and washing of the saints’ feet. Pastor Tomlinson reflected in his journal, “The meeting on the whole was noticeable of the love to one another and the unity....”

Much as R.G. Spurling envisioned at the founding of the Christian Union, this first Assembly employed a process that

## FIRST ASSEMBLY RECOMMENDATIONS



*W.F. Bryant and R.G. Spurling at the Camp Creek home of Melissa and J.C. Murphy, which was the site of our first General Assembly in 1906*

The first General Assembly made these recommendations to the local churches:

- Assembly is “judicial only” and churches are “executive.”
- Assembly and churches should keep records.
- Churches should practice the Lord’s Supper and footwashing one or more times per year.
- Churches should hold weekly prayer meetings.
- Delegates should press into every opportunity for evangelism.
- Churches should oppose the use of tobacco, but deal tenderly with users.
- Families should practice family worship.
- Churches should establish Sunday schools.
- Churches should issue letters of recommendation when appropriate.
- Delegates should meet annually for an Assembly.

raised questions, searched the Scriptures, and sought the will of God. It recognized the importance of respecting others’ voices, even when they differed, and expected that God would speak to the Assembly through those voices. Representatives of local congregations trusted that among Assembly delegates there would be discernment and wisdom, and all were accountable to one another. They viewed themselves as restoring New Testament Christianity rather than perpetuating a “man-made” denomination.

### A Church in Cleveland

Soon after his relocation to Cleveland in December 1904, Tomlinson had begun to work toward establishing a church in the growing city. Early efforts included a series of tent meetings, a mission in rented facilities, and worship in local homes. Then, on October 10, 1906, Tomlinson set in order the church that became known as North

Cleveland Church of God. The congregation was able to build a meetinghouse the next summer, which they dedicated in September 1907. In many ways, the Cleveland congregation became a “mother church” as the local saints and expanding Church of God ministries shared strength, resources, and leadership. ■

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**1915**  
Edmond Barr is appointed overseer of Black churches

**1915**  
Church is organized in Louisiana and South Carolina

**1916**  
Jennie Brinson Rushin provides home for abandoned children in Tsinafu, China



**1916**  
Assembly meets in newly purchased auditorium in Harriman, Tenn.







Soon after being established, the North Cleveland Church of God immediately began ministry in the south of the city including erecting this tabernacle in 1910. This ministry developed into the South Cleveland Church of God. The dinner on the grounds pictured here may have been part of an all-day service on July 4, 1910.

# THE SPIRIT SAID, "GO"

*"The Spirit indicated that workers were to go out from this place, north, east, south, and west and said, 'separate unto me those whom I want for the work whereunto I have called them.' . . . The Book of Acts is being reproduced."*

A.J. Tomlinson  
March 8, 1909

As Tomlinson's ministry expanded, so did the vision of the harvest embraced by the Holiness Church. Evangelism became the heartbeat of members and ministers. The most quoted words of the

first General Assembly describe their commitment: "After the consideration of the ripened fields and open doors for evangelism this year, strong men wept and said they were not only willing but really anxious to go."

## An Empowering Experience

Tomlinson's theology, passion, and vision radically changed when he was baptized with the Holy Spirit. Although others had received a Spirit-baptism experience at Camp Creek, their lack

of a Pentecostal theology limited their experience as a central feature of their spiritual journey. Some likely continued to understand speaking in other tongues as a manifestation of their sanctification.

Tomlinson's interest in Spirit baptism with the evidence of speaking in other tongues began in early 1907. He recalled, "By the close of the year, I was so hungry for the Holy Ghost that I scarcely cared for food, friendship, or anything else. I wanted the one thing—the baptism with the Holy Ghost."

**1916**  
Assembly institutes Elders Council—now Council of Eighteen



**1917**  
Lucy Leatherman is first Church of God missionary to Chile

**1917**  
Church set in order in E.M. Walker's home in Golden Valley, N.D.



**1917**  
Church is established in Arkansas, Maryland, Ohio, Michigan, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Texas



While scheduling the third General Assembly to meet in Cleveland, Tomlinson invited G.B. Cashwell to preach about the Pentecostal experience. Cashwell had received his Spirit baptism at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles. While Cashwell was preaching on Sunday morning, January 12, 1908, Tomlinson fell to the floor under the power of the Spirit. He later described his experience:

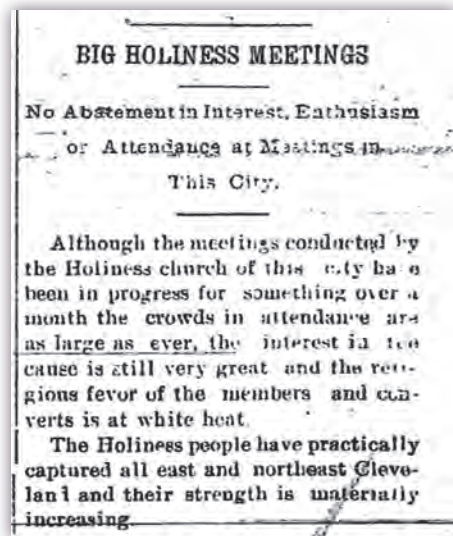
My mind was clear, but a peculiar power so enveloped and thrilled my whole being that I concluded to yield myself up to God and await results. . . . As I lay there, great joy flooded my soul. The happiest moments I had ever known up to that time. I never knew what real joy was before. . . . Oh, such floods and billows of glory ran through my whole being for several minutes!

Lying on the floor, Tomlinson experienced a vision in which he traveled the world preaching the gospel. As he returned to the United States, his attention focused on places he knew:

Then I came back to Cleveland and seemed to be asked if I was willing to testify or speak on the public square of the city; without any effort, my spirit seemed to give consent, then to Chattanooga, then my mind seemed to be carried along the rail road to Cincinnati right on through the city to my old home in Indiana. . . . I seemed to see us all on a missionary journey.

Following Tomlinson's Spirit-baptism experience, his journal overflowed with descriptions of Pentecostal worship and

ministry—preaching, speaking in tongues, interpretations of tongues, healings, and casting out demons. Evangelism along with caring for the poor and needy became normal. Charles Conn wrote, "If A.J. Tomlinson's work for God was energetic before he received the Holy Ghost, it was prodigious afterward; if his effectiveness was good before, it was miraculous afterward."



*A ten-week revival beginning in August 1908 caught the attention of Cleveland, Tennessee. Spiritual results included: 105 conversions, 163 baptized with the Spirit, and 106 added to the church.*

Evangelism became a consuming mission. When warm weather arrived in 1908, Tomlinson pressed a tent into duty in east Chattanooga. Following the establishment of a Church of God there, he pitched the tent in Cleveland in August for a ten-week meeting. Spiritual results included 105 conversions, 163 baptized with the Spirit, and 106 added to the church, including future general overseer, F.J. Lee.

The next spring, the Cleveland church was compelled to take the gospel further. On March 8, Tomlinson wrote about the previous day's Sunday evening service: "The Spirit indicated that workers were to go out from this place, north, east, south, and west. . . ." In late March and early April he undertook a preaching tour to Ohio, Indiana, and Alabama, concluding in Florence where he established the first Church of God congregation in that state.

Returning home for a day, Tomlinson and T.L. McLain then boarded a train bound for Florida. Florida became a great harvest field, and ministry there changed the face of the Church of God from Caucasian to multicultural, and from an American church to an international movement. Their first stop was Tampa where they organized the first Church of God congregation in the Sunshine State.

Their next stop was the Pleasant Grove Campground in nearby Durant. For ten days in May, Tomlinson preached the Pentecostal message and the necessity of being God's church. This latter doctrine proved controversial, but he received 174 members into the church and credentialed nineteen ministers.

## An Empowering Theology

As pastor and our first general overseer, A.J. Tomlinson articulated the theological foundation of the early Church of God. In his book, *The Last Great Conflict*, he reminded readers that God is love and God demonstrates love through His works and the works of His people. Love compelled the Father to give His only begotten Son for humanity.

**1917**  
Fred and Nonie Ryder arrive in Argentina

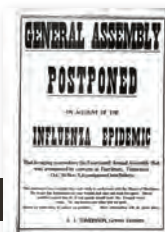
**1917**  
First congregation is set in order in Barbados



**1918**  
Bible Training School begins with 12 students; Nora Chambers is teacher



**1918**  
Influenza pandemic prohibits meeting of Assembly







*Baptist clerk and chorister, F.J. Lee, here with his wife, Eva, came into the North Cleveland Church of God during the ten-week fall revival in 1908. Lee became our second general overseer.*

Referring to this gift, Tomlinson penned, "then love gave love." In Christ, we too obtain the fullness of God's love, which compels us to sacrifice our possessions and our lives to reach the lost. Tomlinson concluded, "This world is dying and going to hell for want of love. They must be loved."

Tomlinson expressed the urgency with which the church must act. He contended that recognition of the value of souls and the reality of hell will cause any church that is half-asleep to wake up, behold the harvest, and act. Rather than shifting the responsibility to future generations, today's church must put resources into the harvest. Those who cannot go should use all means available to send those who are able to go.

Motivation to quickly fulfill the Great Commission grew from a conviction that we are living in the last days. Tomlinson wrote in the inaugural issue of *The Church of God Evangel*, "The command to go, the command to evangelize is just as forcible today upon us upon whom the ends of the world have come, as it was when first uttered by our Lord and great Head of the Church." Echoing Zechariah 14: 6-7, he continued,

The Holy Spirit was given to the disciples in the morning to give them power to accomplish just what they did accomplish. He is given to us today for the same purpose. We dare not falter. . . . The time is short. The harvest is ripe. The sickle must be furbished and put into use.

Connecting Joel's prophecy with the contemporary outpouring of the Spirit, Church of God pioneers saw their experience as the fulfillment of the biblical promise of the latter rain. The outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was for planting God's church, and the outpouring of the Spirit in these last days is to reap the final harvest before the Lord's return.

Tomlinson asserted that the Spirit equips those who go "back to Pentecost" to reach the last-days harvest. First, the Spirit enables believers to testify about Jesus who said, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15:26 KJV). Along with Spirit-empowered speech, returning "back to Pentecost" includes the restoration of the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, along with manifestations of signs and wonders. The results will be a supernatural spread of the gospel.

### By Every Means Possible

The early Church of God employed a variety of means and methods to reach the harvest. The first Assembly recommended Sunday schools as an effective way to plant churches. They observed, "We believe a Sunday school may sometimes be organized and run successfully where a church could not be established at once, thereby opening and paving the way for more permanent work in the future." Brush arbors could be constructed quickly, and tents were a practical and portable way to provide inexpensive shelter for services.

**1918**  
First church in Canada is organized

**1919**  
Assembly designates Cleveland, Tenn. as permanent headquarters



**1919**  
Bible Training School correspondence course begins; Purlia Ables is first to finish



**1919**  
First Church songbook is published—*Church of God Songs, Tears With Joy*

Kenneth O. Brown suggested that tents provided social and psychological space to hear the gospel. It was easier to attend a meeting outside one's own tradition if the setting was not a church building. Additionally, the uniqueness of a tent service held one's attention, and the excitement allowed worshippers to expect and be open to the new and unusual. Tomlinson wrote in his journal on June 22, 1908: "Have been in a tent meeting in Chattanooga. . . . Closed there last night after a siege of 7 weeks. . . . People would stay for hours and sit on the rough boards with no backs, when they could hardly be kept an hour on nice comfortable pews in the churches."

Often, local churches planted missions in nearby communities. Soon after Tomlinson established the North Cleveland Church in 1906, the congregation began looking for places to plant other churches. They held tent meetings, sent workers, provided finances, and in 1910 built a tabernacle to reach the southern part of the city. This led to the organization of the South Cleveland Church of God.

Fulfilling the Great Commission was not just the work of credentialed ministers—every Christian was encouraged to put their sickle into the harvest. Tomlinson challenged the General Assembly in 1911, "We have a number of workers who are not able to preach, but are willing to work at anything they can do. They are able to do personal work, hold cottage prayer meetings, distribute literature, and give ringing testimonies."

## KIMBERLY, ALABAMA



*Tent meeting in Kimberly ca. 1902. The congregation established from this revival came into the Church of God in 1910.*

It was common for Tomlinson to seek out already existing congregations and bring them into the Church of God. This was the case in Kimberly, Alabama.

Martin Haynes was a Christian construction worker living in Birmingham, when the Roman Catholic Church hired him to build St. Vincent Hospital. Among the construction workers he employed were students who had been studying at Charles Fox Parham's Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas. One summer afternoon in 1902, Haynes and his brother Efford attended a meeting where one of the students preached on the Holy Ghost. Soon, Martin and Efford Haynes were baptized in the Spirit and called to preach.

Martin Haynes had utilized coal produced in Kimberly to operate construction equipment. That fall, he was invited to Kimberly to preach about the Holy Ghost in a tent revival on the property of William Doss. Several received the Holy Spirit, a Sunday school began in the Doss home, and an independent church was set in order, which was later called "The Church of God at Kimberly."

When Tomlinson and M.S. Lemons traveled to Birmingham in July 1907 to learn more about the baptism with the Holy Spirit, they met Martin Haynes. Both Martin and Efford became ministers in the Church of God and served on the Elders Council. In 1910, Tomlinson brought the Kimberly congregation into the Church of God.

### Pioneers of Pentecost

Space here allows only a few examples of the many Church of God pioneer evangelists and church planters who sacrificially labored to fulfill the Great Commission—often facing fierce opposition.

#### *J. W. Buckalew*

Called "Old Rough and Ready" by some, John W. Buckalew (1870-1918) became one of the best-known evangelists in the Church of God. One of his most notable meetings was in Alabama City,

**1920**  
Assembly meets in unfinished auditorium



**1920**  
Assembly selects E.J. Boehmer as permanent clerk—becomes office of secretary general



**1920**  
Church of God Orphanage opens in Cleveland, Tenn.; Lillian Kinsey, matron



**1920**  
R.G. Spurling publishes *The Lost Link*





Alabama, in 1910. The *Gadsden Daily Times-News* published the headline "Holy Roller Disturbing Mill Town" and reported, "Preacher defies guns and bulldogs and says he's there to stay." Buckalew later remembered, "We preached to thousands of people, standing around a little gospel tent. Gambling houses, pool rooms, and church ice cream suppers were closed out. . . . The Holy Ghost was there in such power that sometimes when I got in the pulpit to preach, I would see the power on the people in such a way, I would lay my Bible down and begin to invite souls to the altar."

Townspeople expressed complaints about how late the services went into the night and how loud the worship was, so the city council passed an ordinance requiring the meetings close at 9:00 p.m. each night. When worshippers would not leave, drunken officers arrested the evangelist. Jail did not quieten Buckalew and his companions, however. While they sang and shouted, law officers returned to the tent and burned it. Buckalew wrote, "While the flames were ascending, we were in the iron cells praising God that we were counted worthy to suffer shame for His sake." Undaunted, when Buckalew was released the next morning, he returned to the remains of the burned tent and preached the gospel. That night two-thousand people reportedly gathered for the service. A Church of God was planted that remains to this day.

### Fred Chambers and Team

In 1911, Fred Chambers (1869-1950) and his wife Nora accepted a call to minister in western North Carolina. For two years, they served as an evangelistic



*J.W. Buckalew planted the Alabama City Church of God in 1910 after he was jailed and his tent was burned.*

team with E.J. and Millie Boehmer. Fred Chambers wrote, "There were no tithes, offerings, or financial backing from any source, no public works, and not one in [our] band had any money."

Their North Carolina effort began in Culberson, where they faced severe opposition, including losing all their possessions when enemies burned their house. Yet, according to Chambers, on the morning after the fire, "a little band

of the saints gathered around the ashes, the power fell, and we had an old-time meeting, shouting and praising the Lord. The outsiders looked on in amazement."

Fierce opposition continued in Hayesville. The local paper suggested the Holiness band should be tarred and feathered, and their house was pelted with rocks on several occasions. When one man attempted to shoot E.J. Boehmer (1881-1953) while he was preaching, the gun failed to fire.

Preaching near Blairsville, Georgia, the evangelistic team continued to face opposition. Their house was stoned and windows broken. They borrowed a Methodist church, which opponents burned. They moved their services to a schoolhouse, and it was burned. They worshipped in a store, and it was destroyed. When they constructed their own meetinghouse, it too was burned.

Realizing the Church of God could not be burned out of the community, opponents turned their violence toward the preachers. One night a mob of about seventy-five men attacked their cabin, dragged Chambers outside, and beat him until he was unconscious. He described the experience, "They told me they . . . had fully decided to stamp out holiness in that neighborhood. They had two or three large hickories with which they gave me the severe lashing. Two would hold me, one by each arm, and the third fellow would do the beating, while the rest stood and looked on." He continued, "My flesh was badly bruised from the blows, and my nerves were shattered."

**1921**  
Dedication of Assembly Auditorium in Cleveland, Tenn.

**1921**  
First Native American congregation is set in order in Ree, N.D.



**1922**  
Sally A. Shepherd establishes first church in Arizona

**1922**  
Assembly establishes Executive Committee



*Fred and Nora Chambers were part of an evangelist team that faced severe persecution while planting churches in North Carolina and Georgia.*

Ignoring demands to leave Blairsville, the ministers held a service that very night under the protection of the local sheriff. Victoriously, two seekers received the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Looking back on those events, Chambers rejoiced that the suffering they endured resulted in establishing new churches: "While years have passed by and the above events have almost been forgotten, through it all Churches of God are dotted about here and there, and many saints are now rejoicing in the Lord and waiting for the return of the Bridegroom."

### *Sallie A. Shepherd*

The first Church of God congregation in Arizona was born in revival. A headline in the September 2, 1922, *Church of God Evangel* announced: "A Church Established in Phoenix, Ariz." The article's author, Sallie A. Shepherd, had come from California to conduct the revival. The Church of God had licensed Sallie

## EL ESPÍRITU DIJO, "¡D!"

La teología, pasión y visión de A.J. Tomlinson cambió radicalmente cuando recibió el bautismo con el Espíritu Santo. Mientras G.B. Cashwell predicaba la mañana del domingo 12 de enero de 1908 en la tercera Asamblea General, Tomlinson cayó al suelo bajo el poder del Espíritu. A medida que el ministerio de A.J. Tomlinson se expandía, también la visión de la Iglesia de la Santidad se ampliaba en cuanto a la cosecha. La evangelización se transformó en el latir del corazón de los miembros y ministros. El 8 de marzo de 1909, Tomlinson escribió acerca del servicio vespertino del domingo del día anterior: "El Espíritu indicó que los obreros debían salir de este lugar, al norte, al este, al sur y al oeste...".

Como pastor y nuestro primer supervisor general, Tomlinson estableció el fundamento teológico de la Iglesia de Dios naciente. Él escribió que Dios es amor y demuestra ese amor a través de Sus obras y de las obras de su pueblo. La motivación para cumplir con prontitud la Gran Comisión surgió de un sentir profundamente arraigado de que estamos viviendo en los últimos días.

La Iglesia de Dios en sus inicios utilizó diversos medios y métodos para cosechar la mies, tales como enramadas y tiendas de campaña en propiedades arrendadas. Muchos evangelistas pioneros y fundadores de iglesias trabajaron con gran sacrificio por cumplir la Gran Comisión, a menudo enfrentaron una feroz oposición. Entre ellos estaban J.W. Buckalew, Fred Chambers y Sallie Shepherd.

as an evangelist in 1916, while she was married to Benjamin Shepherd and living in Copper Hill, Tennessee. Together the Shepherds conducted revivals and planted churches in Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, and Texas. Shortly after moving to California, Benjamin died leaving Sallie alone. Undaunted, she labored to plant a congregation in Baldwin Park until the Lord turned her heart toward Phoenix.

Shepherd had never been to Phoenix before beginning the revival in which "Satan was present in every service and used all his Satanic powers against us. . . . But God who knows how to direct the battle always wins if we do not hinder." While experiencing a lack of financial resources, she supposed this hardship presented an opportunity to fast for seven days.

God moved in the revival, and several testified of healing, including one of tuberculosis. According to Evangelist Shepherd, "Fire was seen twice during the services, and there were many manifestations of the Spirit." Results included eight saved, five sanctified, and three baptized with the Holy Spirit. On August 6, Brother Hockett (from California) set a congregation in order with fifteen members. ■

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**1922**  
Assembly appoints Thomas Richardson overseer of Black churches



**1922**  
F.J. Lee becomes Bible Training School superintendent

**1922**  
J.S. Llewellyn becomes editor and publisher



**1922**  
Apostolic Pentecostal Church of God begins in Romania

**1923**  
Tomlinson is removed from office of general overseer; F.J. Lee succeeds him





The Pentecostal World-wide Mission Band traveled to the Bahamas in 1911. Back L to R: Unidentified, Unidentified, Flora E. Bower, Lula Williams, Efford Haynes, Clyde (Cotton) Haynes, Ida Evans. Front L to R: Roy C. Miller, J.W. Buckalew, A.J. Tomlinson, R.M. Evans holding Robert Mooreland, Carl M. Padgett.

# A GLOBAL CHURCH

*“Oh, for a million men who would fear nothing but God, filled with such holy zeal and Godly courage, that we could all together burst forth under the power of this mighty baptismal fire and rush to every quarter of the globe, like mad men, declaring the gospel of the Son of God, until every tribe, kindred, tongue and people could hear...”*

A.J. Tomlinson  
*The Last Great Conflict*

A.J. Tomlinson’s theology, passion, and vision for the harvest was not limited to the United States of America. At least as early as 1905, he sensed a calling beyond

the borders of the USA. This perception was intensified with his Spirit baptism during which he had a vision of preaching in tongues as he traveled to ten countries of the world. For Tomlinson, such an experience revealed the urgency of reaching the world in the last days. Pentecostal fire was for a purpose—empowering and enabling the church to win the world for Jesus Christ.

## Beyond the United States

Among those Tomlinson credentialed at the Pleasant Grove Camp Meeting in May 1909 were Robert M. and Ida Evans

and Edmond and Rebecca Barr. From their efforts, the Church of God soon bore international fruit.

Edmond Barr (1868–1925) was the Church of God’s first international connection. Barr was a Black Bahamian who immigrated to Florida in 1893 in search of work. There, Edmond met and married Georgia-native Rebecca Clayton (1868–1934). When Tomlinson credentialed them as evangelists on May 31, 1909, they became the first persons of African descent to hold ministerial credentials in the Church of God.

**1924**  
Missionaries are established in Jamaica

**1924**  
Lettie Cross preaches first Assembly youth service



**1924**  
Assembly recommends statewide camp meetings



**1925**  
Assembly adopts ministerial office of Exhorter



By October 1909, the Barrs realized the urgency of taking the Pentecostal message to Edmond's homeland. Former Methodist minister, Robert Evans (1851–1924), and his wife, Ida (1866–1952), partnered with them to carry the gospel to the Bahamas.

Edmond and Rebecca Barr arrived in Nassau in November 1909 and began preaching. As an American ministering to another culture, Rebecca became our first Church of God missionary. The Evanses, along with Carl M. Padgett, joined them on January 4, 1910. Their partnership reflected the growing Church of God: male and female ministers; multinational with citizens of the United States and the Bahamas; multiracial with persons of European and African heritage; and multigenerational with mature and young participants.

Wilmore V. Eneas and his wife, Arabella, were among the first to come into the Church of God in the Bahamas. Suffering from a lengthy illness, Arabella was sitting on her porch on Meadow Street in the Bain Town community of Nassau when she heard preaching coming from the street corner. It was an unfamiliar message, so she invited the ministers to come to her home and talk. They accepted her invitation and offered to lay hands on her to pray for her healing. Unsure of Pentecostalism at first, Wilmore could not doubt the change in Arabella's life. The Eneas' home became a ministry center in Bain Town, until Wilmore was able to arrange a place for the emerging congregation to meet.

By the time the Evanses and Barrs returned to Florida, W.V. Eneas had emerged as the local leader of the Church of God. In 1915, he led in building a thatch place of worship called "The Camp." About 1918, the congregation was able to build a more proper wooden church house. Ridiculing their enthusiastic worship, the townspeople called the Pentecostals "Jumpers," and they called the location of the Church of God "Eneas Jumper Corner." Wilmore became the first Black Church of God bishop in the Bahamas and served as pastor of the local church, now the East Street Cathedral, until 1961. He also served as overseer of the Bahamas. The Eneas legacy continues to bless the Bain Town community. The home of Wilmore and Arabella is now the W.V. Eneas Clinic—a medical clinic operated by their granddaughter, Dr. Agreta Eneas-Carey.



*Arabella and Wilmore Eneas were early converts in the Bahamas*

### The Pentecostal World-wide Mission Band

Tomlinson's commitment to evangelism led to his creation of the Pentecostal World-wide Mission Band in the summer of 1910. He envisioned a group

of ministers creating music and preaching the gospel. Tomlinson's friend, J.B. Mitchell, provided \$124 to buy band instruments from the Sears Roebuck mail order catalog along with \$125 to purchase a new tent, which Tomlinson had delivered directly to Miami.

Prior to their journey to Nassau, the band scheduled services for two weeks while they organized and practiced. Tomlinson recorded, "The tent here is arranged so as I preach I face the ocean, and in the daytime I can look out over the deep blue sea and think of the heathen beyond. The cry of my heart is, 'O God, help me bear the responsibilities that naturally fall upon me as a leader of the World-wide Mission Band, and give me souls, and means to supply our needs.'"

On February 15, 1911, the band boarded the S.S. *Miami* bound for the Bahama Islands. They would face hardship, danger, and exhausting ministry during their ten-week journey. Upon arrival on New Providence Island, they connected with the Evanses and Barrs and began to locate places to conduct services. They held meetings in the streets, homes, the Market, the Sponge Exchange, and wherever else they could. Tomlinson frequently played the snare drum as the band marched through the streets to attract a crowd. Often dividing into smaller groups to reach more people, one Sunday, they conducted meetings in nine different locations. On more than one occasion, Tomlinson estimated 2,000 people attending services.

**1926**  
Assembly appoints standing boards for publishing, education, and missions

**1926**  
Assembly approves "Church of God Colored Work"

**1926**  
Michigan holds first state youth convention



**1926**  
Work begins for Black orphanage and school in Eustis, Fla.

**1927**  
Assembly adopts plan that offerings equal to 5% of tithes support state and world missions



Beginning with Ragged Island, the band visited Out Islands and cays from March 17 until April 22. They held services in borrowed churches, homes, community halls, and numerous outdoor accommodations. They depended on offerings from home, offerings received during worship services, and the goodness of those to whom they ministered. Tomlinson penned on April 1: “They bring us food of all kinds . . . chickens, eggs, sweet potatoes, crabs, onions, beans, peas, watermelons, papayas, grits, sugar, etc. I have learned to eat crab and lobster.”

Along with blessings came the challenges of travel in an underdeveloped colony. They often experienced rough waters and sea sickness. In addition to larger boats, they traveled by sailboat and packhorse, as well as frequently walking. They slept in rented houses, donated rooms, sometimes on the floor, and outdoors on boat decks when mosquitoes and sandflies did not make sleeping too difficult.

Arriving back in Miami on April 28, it is difficult to estimate the band’s spiritual results. Conversions, Spirit baptisms, water baptisms, healings, service attendance, and church memberships were noted with imprecise numbers. They set in order a Church of God congregation at Clarence Town on Long Island, which doubled the number of organized congregations in the colony. Many Bahamians heard the gospel and received Christian literature, and their journey was an inspiration to Church of God members and friends in the United States.

## Going on Their Own

World Missions Historian Bill George characterized early Church of God missions by observing that dedicated “individual missionaries, sensing a divine calling, went to other countries at their own initiative and expense” before there was a Missions Board or a strategy to raise sufficient finances to send and support them. The Pleasant Grove Camp Meeting raised funds to send Edmond and Rebecca Barr, and Robert Evans reportedly sold many of his possessions to fund his travel along with that of the Barrs. Often, these early missionaries sent letters soliciting prayer and financial support to numerous Holiness and Pentecostal periodicals.

### Lillian Trasher

One of the earliest Church of God missionaries was Lillian Trasher (1887–1961), who established an orphanage in Assiout, Egypt, in 1911. She was baptized with the Holy Spirit and came into the Church of God through a 1909 revival in Dahlonega, Georgia. She did evangelistic work and served at the Elhanan Training Institute and Orphanage in Marion, North Carolina. By 1914, Trasher was a credentialed evangelist in the Church of God.

Trasher did not originally travel to Egypt to establish an orphanage, but she found herself responsible for an infant whose mother had died. With no one else to care for the child, she determined to do it herself and believe God for provision. Over time, she gained the respect of the Egyptian people and political leaders, so

she was able to survive political and social changes when many other missionaries did not. Soon she became known as the “Nile Mother.”



*Lillian Trasher about the time she traveled to Egypt in 1910*

Trasher’s expressions of gratitude for financial support and letters of encouragement frequently appeared in the *Church of God Evangel*; however, she also sought support from many sources, including denominational and independent periodicals. Her last correspondence printed in the *Church of God Evangel* appeared in 1918. She graciously thanked A.J. Tomlinson for an offering with a commendation that he had “always been so faithful in sending to us.” With the orphanage having grown to 90 children, she requested that the general overseer remind Church of God people to pray for her ministry. Her letter concluded, “It is a comfort for us to know that those at home are praying for us.”

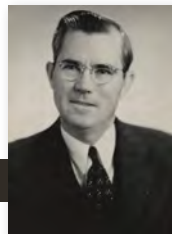
1928

General Overseer F.J. Lee dies during Assembly; S.W. Latimer becomes general overseer



1928

Assembly creates permanent office of assistant general overseer; R.P. Johnson is elected



1928  
Church reports congregations in thirty-two states

1929

Church adopts Young People’s Endeavor



## Lucy M. Leatherman

One of the most fascinating Church of God missionaries was Lucy Leatherman (1863–1924), who attended William J. Seymour’s Azusa Street Mission in 1906, where she received her baptism with the Holy Spirit. Historian Estrelida Alexander stated that among those who went from the Azusa Street Mission, Leatherman “traveled the farthest and most often to spread the message of Pentecostalism. Her ministry touched four continents and more than ten countries, landing her in capitals and remote cities with exotic names and cultures. She was unquestionably one of the most widely traveled persons—either man or woman—to go out from the mission.” Leatherman’s biographer, Wanda Thompson LeRoy described her as “a woman totally sold out to God and the mission He had given her.” Observing Leatherman’s conviction about the soon return of the Lord, LeRoy noted, “This belief took her into areas where women were treated as objects, living conditions were primitive, and peril was always present.”

Leatherman’s early independent missionary work was to Palestine, where she became the first Pentecostal to arrive in Jerusalem in 1907. Her travels also took her to Lebanon, Egypt, China, Japan, and the Philippines before returning to the United States in 1910. She returned to the Middle East in late 1911 and to Jerusalem in March 1912. During that trip, she also spent time in Lebanon and Egypt before being forced to return home due to the outbreak of war in August 1914.

Leatherman connected with the Church of God sometime during her travels in the Middle East. She formally joined in Valdosta, Georgia, and received ministerial credentials as an evangelist in February 1916. By December, she was on her way to South America as a Church of God missionary. Her journey to the global south included stops in Panama and Chile. She was the first Church of God missionary in Chile, where she connected with the Methodist missionary W.C. Hoover, who had come into the Pentecostal Movement. Leatherman arrived in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in early 1918 and worked with Church of God missionaries F.L. and Nonie Ryder, who had arrived there the previous year.



Lucy Leatherman in Jerusalem ca. 1908

Leatherman returned to the United States in early 1921. She had suffered various illnesses during her journeys and died on June 5, 1924. Leatherman’s

letters reveal the hardships early Pentecostal missionaries faced as they endured meager and unreliable resources, complicated and uncomfortable travel, rejection by non-Pentecostal missionaries, political upheavals, persecution, and illnesses.

## María W. Atkinson

Along with sending missionaries, the Church of God has received into membership or amalgamated with persons and groups outside the USA, often accelerating the growth of those ministries by providing missionaries, finances, and educational support. One of the earliest examples was the 1932 reception of the work in Mexico established by María W. Atkinson (1877–1963).

A devout Roman Catholic and native of Mexico, Atkinson was introduced to Pentecostalism in 1924 when she was healed of cancer while living in Douglas, Arizona. Not long after her healing she experienced a vision of heaven and heard God say, “...you are ready to come here, but I need you in the world to carry the gospel to Mexico.” She began preaching and teaching healing on both sides of the border and soon established a mission in Ciudad Obregón, Sonora. Atkinson experienced tremendous opposition by the Mexican authorities who wanted to safeguard Roman Catholicism, as well as by Protestants who resisted her emphasis on the miraculous. The Church of God recognized her as a missionary in 1931, and J.H. Ingram received her Ciudad Obregón congregation into the Church in 1932. Known as “La Madre

**1929**  
Assembly establishes Bishops Council—now International General Council

**1929**  
Alda B. Harrison begins *The Lighted Pathway*



**1929**  
Johnnie Belle Wood begins Ladies Willing Workers Band in Texas



**1930**  
Assembly creates fund to care for aged ministers





María Atkinson is dressed in her typical white preaching attire standing front and center outside the church in Ciudad Obregón, Sonora, Mexico, in 1936.

de Mexico,” she remained an important leader among congregations in Mexico. Prior to her death, she asked that her grave marker be inscribed with the words “Here There Are No Doubts” as a testimony of her faith.

*J.H. Ingram*

Kentucky-born James Henry Ingram (1893–1981) became one of the best known and most traveled missionaries in the Church of God. Converted in 1919 during a Pentecostal revival in Middleton, Ohio, he learned about the Church of God through the *Evangel*. Ingram’s passion for world missions was stirred while hearing a visiting missionary from India. Not long after he received the baptism with the Holy Spirit, he dreamed of the island of Bermuda and began preparing to go there, including selling his car. Trips to Bermuda in 1921 and late 1925 were short-lived due first to an expired visa and later to a family illness.



J.H. Ingram became one of the best known and most traveled missionaries in the Church of God.

When the Church of God appointed Ingram as overseer of Arizona and California in 1929, he looked for an opportunity to reach into Mexico. He was

preaching in the border town of Douglas, Arizona, when he met María Atkinson in 1931. This meeting led to Atkinson’s bringing her ministry into the Church of God.

Ingram’s biographer, Peggy Humphrey, chronicles ten major missionary journeys, including his first into Mexico in 1932. Bill George added, “Although he never served for any protracted length of time as a missionary in the resident tradition, Ingram’s travels and contacts resulted in the establishment of the denomination in dozens of countries.” In 1936, Ingram celebrated the Church of God’s fiftieth anniversary with a “Golden Jubilee Tour,” during which he circumnavigated the world, visiting thirty-one countries and colonies and bringing many congregations and members into the Church of God.

*Robert F. Cook*

“Robert, come with me to a mission where the people speak in ‘other tongues,’ as they did in the early church. I tell you it is all so wonderful. Every time I go there, I am blessed.” With that brief but excited invitation from his father, Robert F. Cook (1880-1958) and his wife, Anna, found themselves in the Upper Room Mission on South Spring Street in Los Angeles, California. By the time of Cook’s visit in 1908, the Upper Room Mission was the largest Pentecostal ministry in Los Angeles.

Some months later, Anna became terribly ill and could find no relief from doctors or medicines. Believing she was dying, Robert called their pastor, Elmer Fisher, to come and pray. Fisher read James 5:14-18,

**1931**  
Assembly authorizes compilation of “Supplement” —now *Book of Discipline*.

**1931**  
Tennessee Music and Printing Company begins

**1931**  
Church appoints Paul H. Walker first overseer of Canada



**1932**  
Assembly elevates office of secretary general to Executive Committee

**1932**  
María W. Atkinson unites Mexican churches with Church of God



**1933**  
Church is established in Haiti; Jacques Vital-Herne is overseer



After meeting J.H. Ingram, Robert F. Cook brought his ministry in India into the Church of God in 1936.

anointed Anna with oil, and prayed. Anna was instantly healed. Later, when Anna became ill again, Robert prayed himself. Not only was Anna healed, but Robert was baptized with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. During that experience, Anna saw a vision in which an angel commissioned Robert to ministry.

In October 1913, the Cooks arrived in India as missionaries. Although Anna died in 1917, Robert remained in India until 1949. While there, he preached, planted churches, opened an orphanage, and established Mt. Zion Bible Institute to train ministers. Realizing the uncertainty of his financial support and that he would one day be unable to care for the growing ministry, Cook began to pray for a Pentecostal group with which to align his ministry. He desired a church body that would treat their Indian brothers and sisters as equal partners in ministry rather

## UNA IGLESIA GLOBAL

El compromiso de la Iglesia de Dios con la evangelización no se limitó a los Estados Unidos de América. Durante el bautismo con el Espíritu de Tomlinson, él tuvo una visión de viajar a diez países predicando en lenguas.

Edmond Barr fue la primera conexión internacional de la iglesia. Barr fue un bahameño negro que emigró a Florida y se casó con Rebecca Clayton, nativa de Georgia. Esta pareja se convirtieron en los primeros ministros afrodescendientes de la Iglesia de Dios. Llamados a llevar el mensaje pentecostal a las Bahamas, llegaron a Nassau en noviembre de 1909. Como estadounidense que ministraba a otra cultura, Rebecca Barr se convirtió en nuestra primera misionera. Robert e Ida Evans, junto con Carl Padgett, se unieron a ellos en 1910. Tomlinson creó la Banda de Misiones Pentecostales Mundiales, la cual estuvo diez semanas en las Bahamas en 1911.

Bill George señaló que los primeros “misioneros de la Iglesia de Dios, sintieron un llamado divino, y fueron a otros países por su propia iniciativa y presupuesto” antes de que existiera una junta misionera o una estrategia para recaudar apoyo financiero para enviarlos. Algunos de los primeros misioneros fueron Lillian Trasher en Egipto, Lucy Leatherman en Latinoamérica, María Atkinson en México, Robert Cook en la India y J.H. Ingram, que viajó por todo el mundo.

than adhere to the evil oppression of the Indian caste system. While seeking the Lord about these things in April 1936, he met J.H. Ingram who was on his “Golden Jubilee Tour.”

When Cook heard of Ingram’s visit to India, he felt the Spirit say, “Here is your help.” As they reviewed the doctrines and teachings of the Church of God, Cook was especially drawn to our holiness

teachings. He called for a meeting of his Indian churches, and they agreed to affiliate with the Church of God. That August, Cook wrote a letter of greetings to the Church of God in the United States. Looking forward to entering yet another unreached area of India, he exclaimed— “Great things are ahead! Let us all take heart and pull together in this, God’s work, not yours or ours, but HIS work.” ■

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**1933**  
Assembly designates editor/publisher as assistant general overseer

**1933**  
R.R. Walker joins Church in Mississippi as first minister with college degree



**1934**  
Assembly Auditorium in Cleveland is too small; Chattanooga, Tenn. hosts Assembly





*The fifth Assembly in 1910 appointed committees whose work resulted in our Doctrinal Commitments and the Church of God Evangel.*



# ENABLING THE MISSION

*“We recommend a closer union and fellowship of all the churches. We, therefore, conclude an assembly composed of elders and chosen men, and the women, from each church, once each year to be of vast importance for the promotion of the gospel of Christ and His Church.”*

First General Assembly

## Annual Assemblies

As the Church of God grew, the need for structure and organization increased. Delegates of the Holiness churches met for an Assembly in January 1906, and their concluding decision was to meet again

each year. The annual Assembly became the central governing body of the Church out of which developed structure and many of the ministries of the movement.

The convening of a “Preachers Conference” at the second Assembly was of particular importance. They unanimously decided to adopt the name “Church of God.” They also instituted the Evangelist’s License for those not qualified to be bishops or deacons. The fourth Assembly in 1909 agreed to provide an Evangelist License to “women who engage in the ministry of the Word.”

The fourth Assembly also recognized the need for a general moderator to serve between Assemblies “in harmony with New Testament order, and on account of the present needs for the general welfare of the churches.” Delegates selected A.J. Tomlinson and then changed the name of the office to general overseer the following year. When the time to select the general overseer came in 1914, affirmation by leading delegates along with tongues and interpretations seemed to confirm Tomlinson as general overseer “until God takes him away.” The office of general overseer was not considered a full-time

**1934**  
Guatemalan missionaries Charles and Carrie Furman join Church of God



**1934**  
New England Bible and Music School begins in Appleton, Maine



**1934**  
Otis McCoy becomes first music editor



**1934**  
Industrial School opens in Eustis, Fla., for Black children





office, however; and Tomlinson continued to serve as pastor of the Cleveland Church until 1911 and again in 1913 and from 1916 to 1918.

Tomlinson utilized the office of general overseer to expand the ministries of the Church, often introducing proposals as part of an annual address at each Assembly. Tomlinson was a visionary leader, and the Assembly largely followed his leadership. When the church began publishing *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel* in 1910, Tomlinson became the editor. His editorial responsibilities increased with the purchase of printing equipment, the decision to print Sunday school literature, and the multiple building expansions of the *Evangel Publishing Company*. When Tomlinson suggested the need for education in 1911, he was made president of the Education Board. When the Church of God Bible Training School was inaugurated in 1918, he was chosen as superintendent. At Tomlinson's suggestion in 1919, the Assembly agreed to build an auditorium and establish an orphanage. He supervised the auditorium construction and served as superintendent of the orphanage. Tomlinson had a vision for the Church, and Assembly delegates responded willingly and enthusiastically.

Always looking for what might be a more effective means of organization, Tomlinson attempted to restore what he believed was the biblical model—expecting that restoration according to the New Testament would bring about supernatural effectiveness. When a method was ineffective, he suggested either improvement or abandonment of that method as the Spirit led the Assembly in interpreting the New Testament.

Desiring to boost evangelization and organization, Tomlinson advocated in his 1911 address to the Assembly, “If a systematic evangelization could be operated in every state where we are already established, I believe great good could be accomplished.” From this proposal, the Assembly instituted the office of overseer in seven states and the Bahamas. Among an overseer's responsibilities was to provide “a general evangelistic campaign,” supply pastors for congregations, and keep records of ministers and churches.

With Black members of the Church living under the tyranny of Jim Crow laws, in 1922 a Black overseer, Thomas J. Richardson, was appointed over Black congregations in the South. Challenges remained, however; and in 1926, Black ministers requested that the General Assembly find a way to “better take care of our affairs among the colored work.” The Assembly agreed, “that the colored people be allowed to have a colored Assembly.” Over the next



*Thomas Richardson was appointed overseer of Black congregations in the South in 1922.*

four decades, Black churches developed a structure referred to as the “Church of God Colored Work.” They established a national office and built an Assembly Auditorium in Jacksonville, Florida, selected national leaders, appointed state overseers, and constructed an orphanage and school in Eustis, Florida.



*In 1916, the Assembly created an Elders Council of Twelve. Members met for the first time in October 1917 in an upper room at the Evangel Publishing Company.*

**1934**

Overseer Paul H. Walker petitions Assembly to establish school in S.D.

**1935**

Florida holds first summer Bible and music school on Wimauma campground



**1935**

Assembly elects J.H. Walker Sr. general overseer



**1935**

Church is organized in Panama

**1935**

First regular term of Northwest Bible and Music Academy in Lemmon, S.D.





## F.J. LEE



*F.J. Lee became the second general overseer.*

Flavius Josephus Lee (1875-1928) was born in Polk County, Tennessee. His family moved to Cleveland when he was fifteen, and he worked with his father as a carpenter and later with the Hardwick Stove Company as a pattern maker. Lee was saved and joined the Baptist Church, where according to his wife, Eva, he was “a faithful member serving as Bible teacher and chorister.” Baptist historian John Conner reports that nineteen-year-old Lee was elected church clerk of the Berry Street Baptist Church and held that office for twelve years.

Lee’s life was radically transformed in August 1908 when he attended the Church of God tent revival in Cleveland. Lee went home, studied the Scriptures, and that night the family kitchen became the altar where he was sanctified. When he returned to the revival, the rear benches proved not to be beyond the power of the Spirit, and Lee received the baptism with the Holy Spirit. According to oral tradition, disturbed and frightened relatives called for a doctor who pronounced Lee’s symptoms as “a good case of religion.”

From that night forward, Lee felt the call of God on his life. He served as pastor of the Cleveland Church of God, as state overseer of Tennessee and Florida, and as one of the first two appointed to the Elders Council. In 1922, Lee became superintendent of the Bible Training School, now Lee University, which is named in his honor. The next year, he became the second general overseer.

### Committees, Councils, and Boards

As do many governing bodies, the Assembly created committees, councils, and boards to further the ministries of the Church. In 1910, the Assembly appointed a committee “to draft examination questions with Bible references.” Their purpose was to assist ministerial candidates, and the August 15, 1910, *Evangel* published their report with the statement: “The Church of God stands for the whole Bible rightly divided. The New Testament as the only rule for government and discipline. Below is given some of the Teachings that is made prominent.” With some modifications, the next Assembly adopted this report, and these “Teachings” continue to serve as Doctrinal Commitments of the Church.

In 1915 and 1916, Tomlinson called for a body of elders “to associate closely” with the general overseer. Citing Acts 21:18, he noted that Paul went to James “and all

the elders were present.” The Assembly concurred, and an Elders Council was selected to have jurisdiction over all matters between the Assemblies with their decisions ratified by the Assembly. There were to be at least twelve (after the twelve Apostles) and up to seventy (after Moses’ seventy elders and Jesus’ seventy disciples). Later, the Assembly determined that the Elders Council would remain as a Council of Twelve and a distinct “Other Seventy” would be selected. Members of the “Other Seventy” were to serve five-year terms. However, it was discontinued in 1929.

The formation of these councils effectively gave authority and voice to other leaders—leaders whom Tomlinson himself had not selected and who sometimes differed with his vision. By 1919, some Elders were questioning the Church’s policies and practices and calling for changes.

Tomlinson attempted to resolve growing tensions in 1922 by suggesting that

the biblical model was for the overseer to select his own counselors. A “Committee on Better Government” disagreed and proposed that the Church would be best served with two additional offices—Superintendent of Education and Editor and Publisher—the genesis of the International Executive Committee.

The difficult events leading to the removal of Tomlinson from the office of general overseer cannot be adequately described in a few words. Among the factors was the adoption of a financial system in 1920 that sent 100 percent of local church tithes to the general treasury to then be divided among pastors. When pastors failed to receive their expected funds, they began to ask questions. Tomlinson admitted to the 1922 Assembly that some tithes had been used to pay general church indebtedness to avoid the shame of bankruptcy. An Investigating Committee later reported that other funds

**1936**  
Assembly recommends every local church establish a Ladies Willing Workers Band

**1936**  
“Church of God Colored Work” dedicates Assembly Auditorium in Jacksonville



**1936**  
South Saskatchewan Bible Training School opens in Consul, Saskatchewan, Canada; later renamed International Bible College





seemed to be missing, including from the orphanage. Tomlinson insisted the audit was incomplete, and although there is no reason to believe he personally benefited, his management of funds and lack of communication bred distrust among some.

The adoption of a constitution by the General Assembly in 1921 created a structure that permitted those who believed change was needed to initiate action. When the Investigating Committee brought their report to the Council of Twelve in June 1923, ten of the twelve Elders filed fifteen charges of impeachment against Tomlinson. Most charges related to the disposition of funds, questions of copyright, and Tomlinson's lack of cooperation. On July 26, a Court of Justice, established in the constitution, removed Tomlinson from office. F.J. Lee was chosen as general overseer, and he served until his death in 1928. S.W. Latimer followed Lee until 1935, when J.H. Walker Sr. became the fourth general overseer.

The constitution had merged the Twelve Elders and Other Seventy into an "Official Assembly." In 1929, the Assembly dissolved the Other Seventy and all ordained bishops became the Bishops Council. This change is reflected in the current practice of recommendations flowing from the International Executive Council to the International General Council to the International General Assembly.

The Twenty-first Annual Assembly in 1926 initiated the practice of appointing standing boards and committees to provide supervision of general church ministries. A Publishing Committee was tasked with selecting, setting the salary, and giving oversight to the editor and publisher; and a Board of Education was

## LA MISIÓN ES EMPODERADA

A medida que la Iglesia de Dios crecía, aumentaba la necesidad de estructuras y organización. Los delegados de las Iglesias de la Santidad se reunieron para una Asamblea en enero de 1906 y su decisión final fue reunirse de nuevo cada año. La Asamblea anual se convirtió en el gobierno central de la Iglesia, a partir del cual se desarrolló la estructura y muchos de los ministerios del movimiento. La cuarta Asamblea reconoció la necesidad de contar con un moderador general, más tarde supervisor general, que sirviera entre las Asambleas y se seleccionó A.J. Tomlinson. Tomlinson utilizó las Asambleas anuales para expandir los ministerios de la Iglesia, incluyendo la publicación del *Evangelio de la Iglesia de Dios*, la impresión de literatura de la escuela dominical, una Escuela de Capacitación Bíblica, un Auditorio de la Asamblea, un orfanato, supervisores estatales y Colored Work de la Iglesia de Dios.

La Asamblea creó comités, concilios y juntas para expandir los ministerios de la Iglesia. Entre ellos se encontraba un comité que redactó las Enseñanzas de la Iglesia, el Concilio de los Doce y las juntas permanentes para la publicación, la educación y las misiones. Las crecientes preocupaciones sobre las finanzas y las políticas llevaron a la destitución de Tomlinson del cargo como supervisor general en 1923. F.J. Lee llegó a ser el segundo supervisor general.

tasked with selecting, setting the salary, and giving oversight to the principal of the Bible Training School. A Committee on Missions recommended a Missions Board to promote missions, determine the eligibility of prospective missionaries, provide passage and support for missionaries, and distinguish between home and foreign missions' funds. According to Bill George, the appointment of a standing board inaugurated the era of "Board-appointed" missionaries by moving responsibility from the overworked general overseer to the Board. One member of the board was designated as the corresponding secretary to communicate with missionaries.

No doubt the previous challenges of maintaining relationships with missionaries influenced the creation of a Missions Board and attention to providing financial support. Too many missionaries had been forced off the field or were lost to the Church of God for lack of support. The situation had improved somewhat

in 1913 when the Assembly appointed a committee to develop funding and oversight. This committee recommended that local churches contribute a tenth of their offerings to missions. Even with this recommendation, resources remained inadequate to send and support missionaries. Some missionaries continued to go on their own as they were able. In 1927, the Assembly asked each local church to give offerings equal to five percent of their tithes. This amount was divided between the state treasury for home missions and the Missions Board for foreign missions. This plan remained in place until 2010. ■

## HERITAGE RESOURCES

- Consortium of Pentecostal Archives online at: [PentecostalArchives.org](http://PentecostalArchives.org).
- Simmons, E.L. *History of the Church of God*. Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1938.

1936

*Gospel Herald* is published for Black youth; P.C. Hickson is editor



1936

J.H. Ingram takes "Golden Jubilee Tour" around the world



1936

Herman Lauster returns to Germany to establish Church of God.

1936

Robert F. Cook brings India Mission into Church of God







**CHURCH OF GOD  
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