



DEDICATION

To Dr. and Mrs. Edward C. Oney, whose vision and devotion, through the first eighteen years of the West Virginia District's history set the highest example of Christian leadership, this 25th Anniversary Album is affectionately dedicated.

THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE IN WEST VIRGINIA

A QUARTER OF A CENTURY has passed since the Tenth General Assembly of the Church of Nazarene in session at Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in June, 1940 set apart the state of West Virginia as a new and separate district. Though two and a half decades do not compose a long era, enough years have passed for us to receive both profit and pleasure from a study concerning those persons and forces which brought the Church of the Nazarene to the Mountain State. It is well that we review and recall the record during our 25th Anniversary celebration.

The writing of history, whether of nations or institutions, serves a number of significant purposes. The late president, John F. Kennedy, in an essay written shortly before his untimely death, emphasized the value of a knowledge of history. He pointed out that, as a means of knowledge, history becomes a means of judgment; a means of sympathy; and a means of strength. As a means of judgement, we can interpret the present in the light of the past. As a means of sympathy, we relate our own experiences with those of others who have lived. As a means of strength, the present generation in crisis is reassured by the sense of continuity with generations past.

This particular volume deals with the history of a church, the Church of the Nazarene, particularly as found in the state of West Virginia.

The need for this history becomes more apparent with the passing of time so that our knowledge of events with names of individuals involved and the dates of those happenings shall not be lost in the obscurity of fading memories of participants yet living. It is hoped that reflected in these pages will be the deep faith, high ideals and total dedication, which served as foundation stones in the establishment of the Church of the Nazarene in our state. Against this background perhaps we, of the present, can more accurately understand what we must do to make today as blessed and fruitful as the past has been.

All too frequently the individuals involved in the early activities of an institution are so busy "making history" they do not take time to record in clear detail those events which shape the future course of the institution they are building. Often, their humility leads them to underestimate the part they are playing, hence they feel that part does not deserve recording. This has been especially true of religious institutions. The history which we are here recording for the first time is an example. No doubt much interesting and meaningful material has been permanently lost for want of a written record and must await the revelations of eternity to come.

The history of the Church of the Nazarene in West Virginia is, of course, interwoven with the history of the total Church of the Nazarene in the United States. No effort is made here to trace the lines of providential action which converged to form our Church, that officially came into being in October, 1908.

However, it is interesting to note that within a year of this date the earliest Nazarene organization appeared in West Virginia. Little is known about this work, except that it occurred in Martinsburg and resulted from the bringing in of an independent holiness tabernacle group relating it to the young denomination. Its existence was short lived and it has been difficult to learn much about it.

The Pittsburgh District, under District Superintendent, Dr. Howard Sloan, is credited with organizing the first enduring work in West Virginia. A tent revival, held in Newell during 1910, resulted in an organization with 13 charter members. Since that humble beginning, Newell First Church has continuously served the spiritual needs of that Northern Panhandle community.

Home Missions and Evangelism have always characterized the spirit of West Virginia Nazarenes. From the beginning, ministers and laymen have shared a common determination to reach new communities. Many members in Newell First Church

were employed in local potteries. It was not strange, therefore, that among the early converts came a large percentage of pottery workers. These hard-working, God-fearing, fire-baptized, holy people took their religion seriously. So much so that, when some moved to Mannington, they determined to bring their church to their new home community.

Cottage prayer meetings began, which soon grew in spiritual power and attendance, and it was felt a revival should be held. Out of this effort, a mission was started, which became the second permanently organized church. This Mannington work then was, in a real sense, the outgrowth of Newell First Church.

Northern West Virginia was a part of the Pittsburgh District, which included also Western Pennsylvania and Northeastern Ohio. It was in this section of the state that the church was begun on enduring foundations.

The Eastern Panhandle was a part of the Washington-Philadelphia District. Though the first work to bear the name Nazarene was effected here, it did not long survive. Several factors contributed to the slow development of our church in this part of the state, namely sparse population, precarious economy, and the pressure



Rev. and Mrs. Chester Acton, First Camp Caretakers

of needs in more highly concentrated population centers within the geographic boundaries of the Districts including it. This area of West Virginia still has the smallest number of churches and in proportion the smallest concentration of Nazarenes of any in the mountain state.

The Southern section of West Virginia, which would include all that portion south of a line drawn from Marlinton on the east to Parkersburg on the west, was considered a part of the Kentucky-West Virginia District. The first organization in this part of the state was effected in Woodrow, a small remote mountain community in Pocahontas County about nine miles from Marlinton.

It continues to this day, though it remains small and unable to support a full-time pastor. This church is not without significant influence, however, for from these first Nazarene families, children have gone to help build and begin new churches elsewhere in the state.

Charleston, the state capital, and the Kanawha Valley was found to be the most responsive field to evangelism. Here the work flourished rapidly. Revival services, held under a tent in West Charleston by evangelist, Rev. C. C. Burton, Rev. and Mrs. Elwood Taylor and Miss Margaret Jackson, resulted in the organization of two churches simultaneously. On July 22, 1928, the Southeast Church and the Charleston First Church came into being in a single service. Forty-two persons composed the membership of these two churches. Rev. Earl G. Hissom, Sr. was appointed pastor of both congregations and, with his assistants, continued to serve until 1931. Rev.

Hissom directed an aggressive Home Mission effort and soon other congregations were worshipping and evangelizing. Charleston became a veritable center of holiness evangelism, and the scene of a genuine spiritual awakening.

In both the northern and southern sections of West Virginia, divided as they were between the Pittsburgh and Kentucky-West Virginia Districts, the Church of the Nazarene continued its ministry of evangelism until the Tenth General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene deemed it wise to unite the entire state into a single district unit.

At that time, according to statistics reported by the district superintendent one year later, there were 48 churches listed, composed of 2,763 members; having a Sunday School enrollment of 8,212 and giving for all purposes \$10,131.00. The value of their property was \$122,395.00. The District, as such, owned no property. This brings us to July, 1940, the date from which we mark our District beginning.

We come now to what may be called the Oney Period in the history of the West Virginia District. History is really the story of men and especially of individuals who, by the strength of their personality, greatly influenced the lives of men about them. To understand the unusual success enjoyed by Dr. Edward C. Oney in his administration as the first District Superintendent of the West Virginia District, it is important to familiarize ourselves with his background and experience prior to his appointment.

Edward C. Oney, son of John C. and Rena Conley Oney, was born July 12, 1890, the eighth child in a family of ten children. There were six boys and four girls. His birthplace is located in Carter County near Olive Hill, Kentucky. He secured his early education in a one-room, country school. Large for his age, young Edward when only 15 years old, decided to drop out of school and leave his farm home to find himself a job.

His first work was in the steel mills of Cincinnati, Ohio. But the lure of places unseen and the developing Northwest led him to the lumber mills of Washington and Oregon. No other secular work ever excited and challenged him like that in the logging camps.

When he described the trees—some six feet through at the butt and a hundred feet to the first limb—and the techniques used to bring them to the mill, his eyes would come alive with the telling. This work required not only dexterity but also great physical strength and he was one of the best in his particular task as “hook tender.” At another time, he served as a millwright in a machine shop.

All of these experiences proved their worth when he finally found his place in the profession for which God had chosen him. During his absence from home—(by the time he was 18 years of age he had traveled over most of the United States)—a Mr. Wells had come to the community. This holy man had been used of God to precipitate a revival that swept the entire county. When, like a wanderer, Edward at last came home, he was warned not to attend the services for they would “get him.” This challenged the wild, reckless nature of the young man and he went. They didn’t get him but God poured out tremendous conviction on his soul and on January 15, 1912, at the age of 21, he was gloriously converted. It took place about 6:00 p.m. in the old community church, where three nights later on January 18, he was sanctified wholly.

Testifying later to this experience he said, “They told me that it was like the first blessing, only better. I said if it was any better, I certainly wanted it.” There was never any doubt, “he got it.” Two weeks later, God called him to preach, and his zeal and enthusiasm set him apart from the first.

The same vigor and emotional drive that made him a wild, reckless sinner, now cleansed by the Holy Spirit, made him a terror to evil and a bold witness to the truth. Prayer meeting held within a radius of five miles of his home found him present. He walked two miles to a meeting on Tuesdays, three miles to a service each Wednesday, and on Saturday, five miles to yet another prayer meeting. Religion was new to him and he dared to take it into every relationship of life.

Shortly after his conversion, he was invited to a dance, where his former acquaintances were gathering. In his words, “When the dance began, a girl came over to me, asking me to dance with her. I took her hand, walked to the middle of the room and announced that I never did anything now until I prayed.” He knelt and prayed loudly until his soul was blessed. When he arose from his knees, the crowd was gone and the dance called off.

Rev. R. E. Dobie and Clyde Pritt



In June, following his conversion, he began to preach, conducting services in schoolhouses around the county. But sensing his need to further an interrupted education, and to prepare for the ministry to which he had been divinely called, he enrolled in God's Bible School in Cincinnati, Ohio. He was now a member of the Pilgrim Holiness Church and it was the year 1913.

Rev. C. E. Cowman, of the Oriental Missionary Society, visited God's Bible School during this year and told of a challenging work then going on in Japan.

Bands of Christian workers were visiting Japanese homes, giving a Gospel portion, a tract, and a personal testimony explaining the way of salvation. Dr. Cowman was seeking volunteers to help this intensive effort to reach every home in Japan.

Such a challenging project was made to order for young Oney, and he offered himself to it with whole-hearted enthusiasm. In 1914 he joined this work in Japan. These Bands were organized in the following manner: Twelve persons made up the group. They walked from house to house in the cities and throughout the countryside, often as much as twenty miles a day. Rev. Oney told that he had actually worn out new shoe soles in a single day, climbing some of the steep rocky paths to rural villages and houses. In the evenings, street meetings were held after which interested inquirers were invited to the hotel rooms of the Christian workers where further instruction was given. This was necessary, since they had no church buildings available to them. The success of this program is seen in the fact that about one out of twenty contacted in the street meetings sought further counseling.

Literature distribution was a most effective means of evangelism then because the literacy of Japan was rapidly growing. Though most older people could not read, practically every teen-ager could and would read everything he could get his hands on. This meant that around the entire family circle the young would read the gospel story while the older members listened.

During 1915 Rev. Oney returned to the United States to raise more money—he was always exceptionally successful doing this—and increase the number of volunteers for the Bands of Workers. But most of the time between 1914 and 1917, he was in Japan engaged in this work of literature distribution. During this time, he met Rev. William Eckels, the first Nazarene missionary to reach Japan. He was urged by Rev. Eckels to remain in Japan as a Nazarene but decided against it.

In assessing this phase of his ministry, Rev. Oney found great satisfaction with its outreach—every Japanese home had been contacted by someone from the twelve bands that finally were engaged. However, without organized churches to which converts could be directed for further guidance, many returned to their idols and former manner of life. It is no doubt true that the eminent success of our Nazarene Missionary Work, led by the able William Eckels, owed much to the seed sown by these walking evangelists of the Bands sent forth by the Oriental Missionary Society.

In 1917, World War I was in progress and Edward Oney returned home. His five brothers, now married with families to care for, were deferred from military service. But the United States needed volunteers to take up the historic cause of freedom. After talking it over with his father, Rev. Oney, now an ordained minister, enlisted in the Medical Corps for he felt such a large family should have a representative in the Army. Being yet unmarried, he saw himself as the logical representative to take up arms.

His training was received in Camp Hancock, near Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. He soon convinced his fellow soldiers he was not only a real Christian, he was a real man. All assignments were accepted cheerfully and it was soon obvious here was a man who could lead other men. Although offers of training for the chaplaincy and an officer's commission were made, he steadfastly refused, believing his greatest usefulness could be enjoyed as an enlisted man. He was a part of Hospital Unit 53 assigned the 13th Army and on July 13, 1915, loaded ship at Hoboken, New Jersey, from which port they sailed to England. One week after reaching England, they crossed the channel and landed in France, where they moved to the front in the midst of the Battle of the Argonne Forest. Oney was soon a Sergeant First Class with some 250 men under his command. Working with the wounded and dying, he was able to perform many religious services for the men. In fact, they called Sergeant Oney

Office at District Camp





First District Assembly July 23-25, 1940, Charleston South East Church

more frequently than they would the regular Chaplain for they believed in his religion.

The tremendous physical and emotional pressures of these closing days of World War I took their toll on Rev. Oney's strength, and he worked with little rest day and night. As a result, he, himself, required hospital care and was a patient when the Armistice was signed in November, 1918. He was discharged from the hospital as temporarily totally disabled.

Following his discharge, he moved west to Nebraska, where he conducted revivals and helped to organize Pilgrim Holiness Churches. Periodic visits to the Veterans Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, were made and on one occasion his deteriorating health forced a stay of several months. Finally, after both military and civilian doctors gave him up, he was sent home to die.

Instead, he went back to Nebraska to a pastorate and continued preaching. However, failing strength made his resignation necessary. On the advice of a Dr. Morris, he homesteaded a section of land in Wyoming. This step he always believed saved his life. He spent five months in each of two years on his claim to fulfill the law regarding homesteads and built a cabin there.

In 1920 the greatest event of his life, excepting his conversion and sanctification, occurred. He was united in marriage to Miss Sophia Bolt. The ceremony took place at Bolt's Fork, Kentucky and was read by evangelist, Rev. Bona Fleming. Rev. Oney and his bride spent some of the months of their early marriage in the cabin on his Wyoming homestead.

Two children were born to the Oneys. In 1924, a son, Charles Edward, and on December 10, 1930 a daughter, Mary Ruth.

Following the partial retirement in which he regained his health, Rev. Oney evangelized, traveling across the United States. Sometime, probably 1924, he secured a subscription to the Herald of Holiness. As he read, it was apparent these folk had

been misrepresented to him, and indeed here was the church in which rested his greatest opportunity to serve God and men.

So in 1925 he transferred his church membership and ministerial relations to the Church of the Nazarene. This was a significant step for both the Oneys and the Church of the Nazarene, especially West Virginia District.

A pastorate at Ashland, Kentucky and then several years of evangelism followed his uniting with our Church. In 1931, he was called to pastor the Church in West Chester, Pennsylvania. The Oney family moved to this congregation just after Thanksgiving in November of 1931.

The group worshipped in a basement unit on which they still owed \$8,000.00. The great depression was on and the financial situation looked almost hopeless. The new pastor, after the period of adjusting to his surroundings, shocked the board by suggesting a building program. After a discouraging discussion, they saw he was not a man easily denied. The green light was given him and almost single-handed he secured finance and labor, building a fine parsonage for an unbelievable cost of only \$3,000.00.

The church grew rapidly. In the summer months, the pastor held tent revivals in different sections of West Chester and outlying areas, with the result that hundreds of people were converted. As the church membership and Sunday School attendance increased, the finances increased. Soon a new sanctuary was erected above the basement. The Oneys spent nine wonderful and successful years with this gracious congregation, seeing it become one of the strongest in the Washington-Philadelphia District.

In 1940, Dr. H. V. Miller had been elected a General Superintendent in the Church of the Nazarene. His first assignment was the organization of the new West Virginia District and conducting its first Assembly. The first item of business for him to take care of was the choice of a District Superintendent. No one could doubt God's leadership when Dr. Miller contacted Rev. Edward C. Oney.

The date of the Assembly had been set for July, 1940, but the selection of Rev. Oney as the Superintendent was a well-guarded secret. Speculation ran high, of course, and a mail poll was conducted to ascertain whom the pastors were considering. Several men were in the minds of the people.

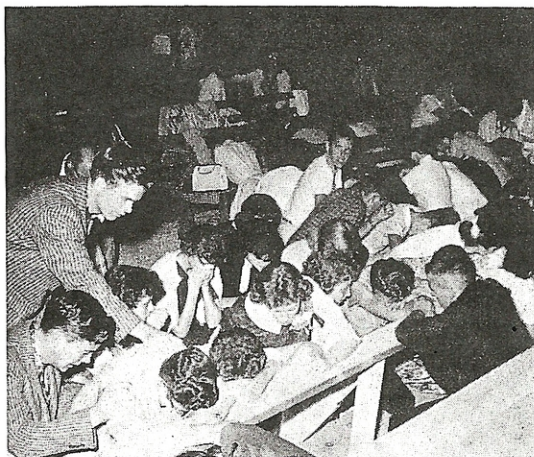
Finally the moment came for presenting the new District Superintendent. Dr. Miller, in characteristic fashion, eloquently described the kind of man needed in the beginnings of this new district. The audience waited in spellbound silence until the General Superintendent said, "and we find all these qualities in Brother Edward Oney." He invited the new District Superintendent to join him on the platform. But instantly the blessing of the Lord was poured out upon the Assembly and it was like bedlam. Folk shouted, whistled and cheered. The building fairly rocked with the sound. It seemed the Divine validation of this choice. Rev. Oney could scarcely get through the crowded aisles to the platform so as to greet the people and to respond, accepting the appointment.

This providential direction was verified again and again through the eighteen years that followed. It would be impossible to compress within the scope of this history the full record of Dr. Oney's successful ministry. All his earlier experience and training were in preparation for this major task God had in store for him.

In these eighteen years, Dr. Oney organized 79 new churches. Church membership increased to 7,441. Sunday School enrollment to 18,508, and the value of church property to a total of \$4,270,200.00, and the giving for all purposes in the year 1957-58 was \$901,308.00. This meant a gain in these eighteen years of 4,678 in membership, of 10,376 in Sunday School enrollment and in property valuation of \$4,147,805.00. In addition to this, a District parsonage, valued at \$40,000, housing not only living quarters for the Superintendent but also office space, was erected in the Kanawha City section of Charleston. Also 40 acres of land were purchased for a District Center and necessary buildings erected including tabernacle, dining rooms, caretaker's cottage, dormitories and nearly fifty privately owned cottages on these grounds. In the developmental progress of the camp, Rev. Oney led the way, not only by the inspiration of his spirit but by the knowledge he had acquired through earlier years of manual labor and military service. He possessed in great measure the ability to inspire men to fulfill a dream and bring a vision into reality. Under God he was



"Camp Cook"—
Mrs. John Reese



Altar Scene at NYPS Institute

able to unite a group of churches into a cohesive, smoothly operating evangelistic force. It is no strange thing to call this the Oney Period in the history of the West Virginia District, for the name of Dr. Edward C. Oney will always evoke appreciative comment and genuine love from those who knew him and worked closely with him. After eighteen years of fruitful service, due to failing health, Dr. Oney resigned in the midst of an extended call and retired from the active ministry to his home near Catlettsburg, Kentucky. There he has continued to reside until this writing. Though his ministerial efforts of necessity had to cease, he has continued actively in the support of the church and has served in Ashland First Church of the Nazarene both as Sunday School Teacher and member of the local church board.

Mrs. Oney served faithfully in exemplary manner beside her husband through those years. Her beautiful spirit and consistent witness endeared her to thousands of friends across West Virginia.

In the Assembly of 1958, on the second ballot, Rev. H. Harvey Hendershot, pastor of Parkersburg First Church, was elected to succeed the retiring Dr. Oney. He was received graciously by the Assembly when presented by General Superintendent, Dr. D. I. Vanderpool, then presiding. Six and a half years have passed since that Assembly.

Significant progress has continued. Building programs in local churches and at the District Center have raised the property value to above six million dollars. At the Camp, four new permanent-type dormitories have been built and equipped.

A District Revolving Fund has been set up, and contributions now total \$55,000.00 with plans to raise this to \$75,000.00 during the Silver Anniversary Year.

Twelve new churches have been organized. Total membership has reached 9,072. A net increase of more than 1,000 was enjoyed in the last three years. A united spirit of commitment to our task of holiness evangelism grips our people. To God be praise and glory!

Perhaps, some day, someone will do the necessary research to write a history of the Church of the Nazarene in West Virginia in depth. Limited time for research may have contributed some minor errors to this task. We have had to rely on the memories of some who are advanced in years. It is always possible that recollections become mixed with error. However, conscientious attention has been given to accuracy.

A detailed, though brief, history of all local churches, that now comprise the West Virginia District is found in this volume. These are grouped according to the twelve zones which now partition the state in our organizational structure. Elsewhere in the album will be found lists of district officers who have served from the beginning of the district until the present.

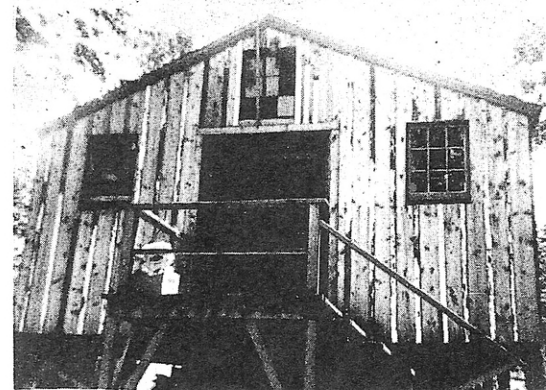
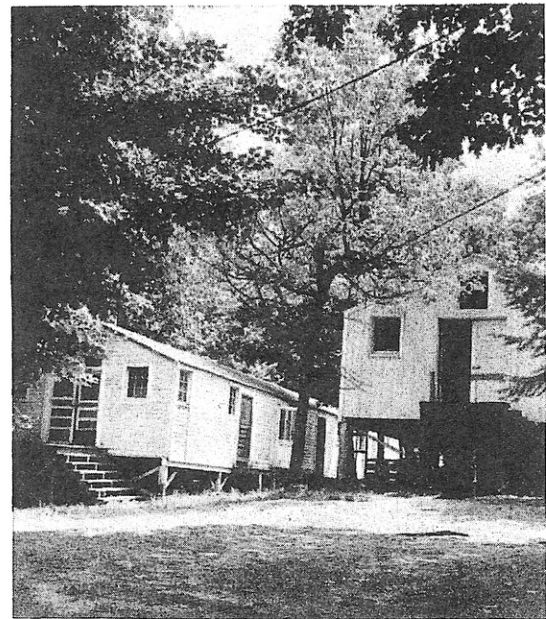
History has been written, not so much on the pages of a book like this, but in the spirits and minds of men. Since 1910, when the Church of the Nazarene first planted its flag within our state, many there are who have already realized the eternal blessedness of the more excellent glory!

In the great final day when God begins to reward His servants, thousands will rise up to bless those who brought second blessing holiness and the Church of the Nazarene to the hills and valleys of West Virginia.

It remains the task of us who yet live to add the chapters of our life-times. May God give us the grace, wisdom, and devotion to write as well as they, who first came this way. Thus we will give our children and succeeding generations reason to rejoice in their spiritual heritage.

A PRAYER OF REDEDICATION

Our Father, Almighty God: Thou who didst lead our forebearers in times of yore . . . When days were bleak and scarce their earthly store. They counted not the cost nor sought the praise of men . . . These rugged ones . . . on mission bent . . . a destiny to win! In memory of these dedicated lives: In love we bring ourselves to thee anew . . . And pray that we may also be a part . . . "of thine own faithful few." And if tomorrow thou dost give . . . that each of them will be . . . A full surrender to thy will . . . unto eternity!



"Old Barrack-Type Men's Dormitories"