

Boyd Collection Finding Aid
Abilene Christian University
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Title: The R. Vernon Boyd Collection

Collection number: 2009.11

Date range: 1968-2003

Finding aid prepared by: Mary Lee Bartlett, PhD

Access and provenance: The collection is available at the Center for Restoration Studies, Brown Library of Abilene Christian University, Abilene Texas.

Preferred citation: R. Vernon Boyd papers, ACU2009.11, Center for Restoration Studies, Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas.

Creator sketch: Reece Vernon Boyd (b. 1932) became interested in Restoration history and the development of African American Churches of Christ through his ministerial work in racial reconciliation in Chicago during the sixties. This interest led him to a study of early African American evangelists from the South and their connection with the growth of the churches particularly in the Chicago and Detroit areas. His first book, *Undying Dedication: The Story of G. P. Bowser* (1986), chronicled the life of G. P. Bowser, an early African American evangelist in the Churches of Christ. His latest book, *A History of the Stone-Campbell Churches in Michigan* (2009), traces the establishment and growth of Churches of Christ in the state. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Lipscomb University and three degrees in Bible from Harding University Graduate School of Religion. His preaching career has taken him from his birthplace in Tennessee to Mississippi, Illinois and finally to Michigan. In the late sixties, he was the minister of the Stony Island Church of Christ in Chicago and from 1971 until his retirement in 2001 he ministered at the Strathmoor-Oakland Church of Christ in Michigan. As part of the research for his books, Boyd interviewed numerous prominent African American elders and evangelists beginning in the 1960s. Although many of the tapes were lost due to

vandalism of his office in Detroit, he donated the remaining collection of interviews and information that he managed to preserve to Abilene Christian University in 2009. The collection provides first-person stories of the development of the early African American Churches of Christ, race relations, and family histories of many of the early African American evangelists either in their own words or from the memories of people that knew them well.

Scope and content: This collection of audiotapes and transcripts focuses on people prominent in the growth and development of African American Churches of Christ, particularly those with connections in Tennessee, Chicago, Illinois, and Detroit, Michigan. The topics covered include family history from the time of slavery, racial issues in the South, memories of the development of African American Churches of Christ, early church services, and issues of segregation both within the Churches of Christ and the community at large. The collection consists of 20 separate folders, 12 audio cassettes and 5 audio mini cassettes of interviews. The folders contain summary transcripts of the interviews, notes, and related material about each of the individuals interviewed and also essays by Boyd. Verbatim interviews are available for some of the tapes in the collection. A complete inventory can be found in the collection interview summaries. Many of the individuals interviewed relate stories about two of the most influential evangelists of the early Churches of Christ: Marshall Keeble and G. P. Bowser. Some of the interviewers discuss both the early Christian school at Silver Point, Tennessee and later schools started by G. P. Bowser in Nashville, Little Rock, and Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas. The files are arranged in alphabetical order. All of the written material has been photocopied onto bond paper and copies have been made of the audiocassettes. Short biographies of the individuals referenced in the files follows:

Norman Adamson: Norman Adamson was born in Nashville, Arkansas and moved to Chicago, Illinois when he was in high school. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Masters degree from Governors State University in Illinois and a theology degree from Southwestern Christian School. Other education includes executive training programs at

the University of Virginia and at Duke University. Adamson worked for the U.S. Postal Service for 34 years, served as sectional center postmaster in Tyler and Waco, Texas, and was director of the Office of Equal Employment Opportunities of the National Postal Service in Washington DC. While living in Chicago, Adamson served as an associate minister in the predominantly white Stony Island Church of Christ working with R. Vernon Boyd to reach out to both the black and white communities. Adamson was active in the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. In 1992, he returned to Nashville as minister of the Dodson Street Church of Christ and while there began the Dodson Street Family Life Center to provide an after school program for school children. This file consists of the weekly columns that Adamson wrote for the *Nashville News* from May 1992 to January 1993. In addition, the file includes a copy of a draft essay written by R. Vernon Boyd in 1970 about racial issues and specifically his memories of the reaction of the previously white Stony Island Church of Christ to the hiring of an African American minister.

Folder contents: 2 files; Typewritten history; Photocopied newspaper columns written by Mr. Adamson for the *Nashville News* dated May 14, 1992 to January 28, 1993; Weekly column; Biography in newspaper article ; No birth or death dates.

Carl Baccus (b. 1952): Dr. Carl C. Baccus serves as minister and elder of the Southside Church of Christ in Los Angeles, California. He has held this position for over fifty years. He was born in Midway, Texas, and he attended the Antioch Church there and later several of the early Churches of Christ in Dallas where he was greatly influenced by R. N. Hogan, G. E. Steward, and J. S. Winston. He began preaching at the age of 11 and was ordained at the age of 14. His education includes BA and MA degrees from Pepperdine University and a doctoral degree from the California Graduate School of Theology. He has broadcast on radio and television and has instituted many outreach programs in his community. The file consists of notes taken by Vernon Boyd relating to a conversation with Baccus in 1978.

Folder contents: 1 file: Minister in Los Angeles, California; Interview notes, dated November, 1978.

Mrs. Walter Balloon (1914-): The interview consists of two audio tapes and accompanying verbatim transcript. In tape one, Mrs. Balloon reads a paper written by her mother relating her mother's memory of the history of the Silver Point Normal Industrial School started by G. P. Bowser in 1908. Her mother attended the school and paid her tuition by working in the printing office of the *Christian Echo*. In the second tape, Mrs. Balloon relates her own memories of Silver Point, G. P. Bowser, and her own father, Thomas H. Busby. Her father also attended the school at Silver Point, which is where he met her mother. Busby was a well-known evangelist, who preached throughout much of the South from bases in Nashville and Arkansas.

Folder contents: 1 audio tape; No original file accompanies the tape.

Susy Minor Bynam (Mrs D. J. Bynam) (1889-): The file consists of an annotated transcript of an interview on October 29, 1973 and a short second interview the next day. Mrs. Bynam was born in Mississippi, attended school there and then spent two years at Southern Christian Institute. From her earliest memories, her family were members of the Churches of Christ in Mississippi. In the tape, Mrs. Bynam talks about her heritage and her family, the early church in Mississippi, and her memories of early evangelists, including G. P. Bowser and Marshall Keeble. Her first husband, who died young, was a farmer. They eventually moved to Memphis to find better employment where he died after a long illness. Her second husband was D. J. Bynam, a noted evangelist. In the interview, she talks about moving to Detroit after marrying Bynam and of black and white relations in her family, stories about Bynam and his preaching, and black and white relations in the churches with which she is familiar.

Folder contents: Transcript of the interview; Interview notes.

John R. Flowers (1908- 2006): John Flowers was born in Wilson County, Tennessee and moved to Detroit after finishing high school. He has served as an elder and minister at the Northwest Church of Christ and in 1955, was the first to speak at the National Lectureship on "The Work of Elders." He was a charter member of the Leaders of Concerned Brethren in Detroit. The file consists of three hour-long audiocassettes and both a verbatim and a summary transcript of those tapes. In the interview, Flowers relates his family history and his memory of race relations, early church services, and

growing up and working briefly as a farmhand in Tennessee as a boy. Much of the interview discusses his memories of the evangelists that he knew, including G. P. Bowser and Marshall Keeble. He also discusses the dispute over the role of elders at the Joseph Campau Church of Christ in Detroit.

Folder contents: Transcripts of interviews, dated April 26, 1978, April 1, 1997, January 7, 1998, and May 31, 1999.

Samuel Garner (1915-) and Mattie Garner: The interview begins with Samuel Garner. Mrs. Garner enters later. Both were born in Tennessee and moved to Detroit after they were married. Mr. Garner worked for the Packard Plant until he was drafted into the Army during World War II and Mrs. Garner worked at the plant during the war. Both were involved in the controversy at the Joseph Campau Church and the disagreement over the role of elders that resulted in a court trial. Most of the interview centers on their memories of the problem and their role in the resolution of the dispute.

Folder contents: 3 audio tapes; Verbatim and a summary transcript of the interview.

Richard Nathaniel Hogan (1902 –1997): R.N. Hogan was born in Monroe County, Arkansas. He was adopted by G.P. Bowser and attended the school at Silver Point for a brief time and then the Southern Practical Institute in Nashville. When the Bowser family moved to Louisville, Kentucky, he went with them and finished school there. His preaching took him to most of the fifty states and he was instrumental in starting many congregations. In the interview, he talks about his evangelistic work, particularly in Texas, Oklahoma, California, and Chicago. He was minister of the Figeroa Church of Christ in Los Angeles, California, for many years. Hogan was instrumental in the founding of Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas, and served on the Board of Directors. He is the author of several books and articles, including *Sermons* (1940), and was editor of the *Christian Echo* beginning in 1953. A scholarship has been established in his name at Pepperdine University. In the interview, Hogan talks about the experience of his family with slavery, black and white relations in the beginning of some African American churches, his early memories of the Church, inter-racial relations, and disputes in the Church concerning the role of the Elders.

Folder contents: 3 audio reels; Transcript of interview.

A.C. Holt (1891-1979): Andrew Clarence Holt, known as Clarence, was educated in Marshall County, Tennessee, and the Tennessee State Normal School. He was the minister of the Jefferson Street Church of Christ in Nashville, Tennessee, and one of the founders and the first president of the Nashville Christian Institute. In 1943, he moved to Detroit and was the minister of the Cameron Avenue Church of Christ for 40 years before retiring and moving back to Tennessee. In the interview he talks about his memories of G. P Bowser as well as his own teaching at the Nashville Christian Institute, his evangelistic work, including preaching in Atlanta, and his work in Detroit. At the conclusion of the interview, he talks briefly about his views regarding Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement.

Folder contents: Transcript of interview; Obituary.

Marion Francis Holt (1895-): Marion F. Holt was born in Marshall County, Tennessee. He was trained as a teacher at the Teacher's Training Course at A and I State College in Nashville. He was married for several years to Thelma Holt. They had six children, two of whom became preachers. While in Indianapolis, he preached for several years and taught school before returning to Tennessee to the Jefferson Street Church of Christ. He also taught at the Nashville Christian Institute. The interview focuses on his early remembrances of the Churches of Christ in Tennessee and his association with many early evangelists mentioned in the book *Our Ministers and Song Leaders* by Annie C. Tuggle.

Folder contents: Typewritten notes.

Sam Holt (1898 -): Sam Holt was born in Hardin County, Tennessee. He was educated in a Christian school in Edwards, Mississippi, and then attended A & I State Normal in Nashville. In 1925, he moved to Detroit. Only a portion of the interview is transcribed in the file and no tapes are in the collection. In this section of the interview, Mr. Holt talks about black and white relations in the South after the Civil War and inter-racial mixing in his own family during their years as slaves.

Mrs. Thelma Bowser Holt: Mrs. Thelma Holt was the daughter of G. P. Bowser and from the age of four went with him when he preached. Mrs. Holt was married to Marion F. Holt and they had six children. Two of the boys, Marion Holt and G. P. Holt, were well-known ministers. Mrs. Holt is the author of the book *The Best from the Pen of Thelma M. Holt*. In the interview she relates early family history from the slavery period. Much of the interview centers on her memories of her father, the early development of the Churches of Christ, and the division between the Christian Church and the Churches of Christ. She talks about the early schools started by her father and relates her own history and memories of black and white relations, particularly as it is related to Churches of Christ.

Folder contents: 1972 interview is hand-written and typed; 3 pages of handwritten notes; Book release notice; Handwritten letter from Thelma Holt to "Dear C. Workers", dated March 1974; Handwritten note by Reece Vernon Boyd, dated June 1973; Transcript of undated interview with Thelma Holt; Summary of interview and family history (not verbatim transcript).

Levi Kennedy (1899-1970): Levi Kennedy was born in Hickman County, Tennessee. His father was an ex-slave and a Gospel circuit preacher. Following his father's last request, Kennedy became a preacher. He moved to Chicago in 1926 and oversaw the growth of the Churches of Christ in Chicago from one small congregation to at least twelve. He was the minister for the Michigan Avenue Church of Christ and was considered to be one of the four most influential of the early black ministers in the Churches of Christ, who were known as the "Big Four." In the interview, he talks about early church meetings with preaching by Alexander Campbell, a black preacher from Nashville, and his own preaching, beginning in 1923. He relates experiences working in the mines in West Virginia and starting a church there. He moved to Indiana before settling in Chicago.

Folder contents: Handwritten notes; Obituary.

John Kolb: John Kolb grew up in Crenshaw County, Alabama, where he was a cook on the farm in which he lived. He first moved to Detroit when he was about 20 years old. In the interview he talks about growing up on a farm, his early introduction to the Christian Church, and early preachers including Marshall Keeble. He also discusses briefly his own brief preaching experience in Detroit, where he preached for the Trumbull Avenue Church of Christ.

Folder contents: Transcript of interview at Trumbull Avenue Church, dated June 17, 1979.

Floyd Rose (b. 1938): Floyd Rose is the President of the Valdosta-Lowndes County Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Pastor Emeritus of the Church at Pine Hill in Valdosta Georgia, his hometown. For 39 years, he lived in Toledo, Ohio and preached at the Ridgewood Church of Christ. He started the Family Baptist Church in Toledo in 1979 and returned to the Churches of Christ in 1994. As a much sought after speaker and evangelist, he has held workshops and meetings throughout the United States. In addition, he is the author of several books including *Beyond the Thicket; Here I Stand, An Idea Whose Time Has Come*, and *Money Without Guilt*. While living in Toledo, he and his wife founded the Save Our Children Association. He has been active in the Civil Rights movement and fought for women's rights within the church. In the interview, he talks about his family. His father was a preacher in Churches of Christ, first in Valdosta in a church started by Marshall Keeble in 1883 and later in Atlanta and Detroit. He relates early memories of his experience as a boy preacher with Keeble and traveling and preaching in towns like Abilene, Texas. After hearing him preach, Billie Sol Estes sponsored him so that he could attend first Nashville Christian Institute, then Southwestern, and finally McMurry College. He talks about not being admitted to Abilene Christian College because he was an African American and focuses on his experiences in the Civil Rights Movement and black and white relations within the Churches of Christ.

Folder contents: Interview transcript of 3 tapes.

G.E. Steward (1906-1979): G. E. Steward was born near Shreveport, Louisiana and was raised near Longview, Texas. He lost his eyesight when he was twelve and attended the State School for the Blind in Austin. Much of the interview focuses on his relationship with G. P. Bowser, who baptized him in 1931. Steward preached in Abilene, Texas, for three years in the 1930s and moved to Memphis in 1936. He served as preacher at the Vance Avenue Church of Christ in Memphis, the Third Ward Church in Houston, and in Oklahoma City before moving to Detroit to the West Side Church. Stewart was a staff writer for the *Christian Echo* and is the author of *Our Pulpit* and *What the Bible Teaches about Illicit Sex and Homosexuality*. In the interview he talks about his family history and about Bowser. The file consists of information about Steward and includes a term paper and his obituary.

Folder contents: Transcript; Obituary written by Vernon Boyd; Sermon album *What the Bible Teaches about Illicit Sex and Homosexuality*; Term Paper, "G.B. Bowser and the Silver Point Christian Institution" by Michael Case, dated November 1982; Memorial booklet, "G.E. Steward Memorial Book" by Mrs. G.E. Steward; Pamphlet, "Caterina Halepa Catsatos at work on Bust of G.E. Steward", Athens Greece, dated 1963.

Carl Swanigan (d. 2006): The transcription is brief. An audiocassette is not a part of the collection. A note on the transcript documents that Tape 1 was defective. In the brief transcript, Swanigan talks about his family history beginning with his grandfather, who was known as Parson George Ricks, a slave brought to Tuscumbia, Alabama, in 1850 at the age of 13. Parson Ricks was introduced to the Christian Church by his owner's wife and was baptized by Preston Taylor. Mr. Swanigan's grandfather could read and write and after the Civil War started a church in Alabama. He was the first African American to own property in Alabama. The church built by Parson Ricks is called "Christian Home" and is listed as a state historic site, as is the nearby family cemetery.

Folder contents: Transcript of tape 2; Note documenting tape 1 was defective; Short 2 page transcript; Handwritten notes; Typed paper entitled "The Story of George and Eliza Fort Ricks our Progenitors" created for a biennial family reunion July 18 - 21, 2002; Letter to Lawrence Oaks of the Alabama Historical Commission, dated July 15, 1986; "The Christian Home of Emancipated Souls" by Ervin C. Jackson, dated March 6, 2000.

Orum Lee Trone (d.2008): O.L. Trone was one of the most influential African American preachers and evangelist of his day in the Churches of Christ. He was the long-time minister of the Elmwood Park Church of Christ in Detroit, Michigan, and founder of the Church of Christ National Youth conference. He was born in Lum, Alabama, and moved with his family to Birmingham, Alabama. In 1921, the family moved to Detroit to work in the Ford factory as a way to escape the segregated South. The transcript of the interview with Trone is four pages and the tape is not in the collection. The focus of the interview is on Trone's family history, their move to Detroit, and briefly about black and white relations encountered by his family.

Folder contents: Transcript of interview.

J. S. Winston (1918-2001): John Steve Winston was the minister of University Church in Cleveland, Ohio, and the founder of the Sound Doctrine Foundation. He was born in Arkansas and adopted by G. P Bowser. When Bowser wanted to found the Bowser Christian Institute which became the Southern Bible Institute and later Southwestern Christian College, he turned for help to Winston and R.N. Hogan, Levi Kennedy and G. E. Steward, together known as the "Big Four." In 1982, Winston founded the J.S. Winston Foundation to help young preachers and their families and to support Southwestern Christian College. In the interview, Winston talks about growing up in the early Churches of Christ and his family's early involvement with the church in Arkansas and later in Oklahoma. His grandfather, raised a slave, became one of the pioneer preachers in Arkansas starting a church in Plummerville and later Northway, Arkansas. Winston followed in his footsteps under the guidance of G. P. Bowser. The file consists of a summary transcript of the interview.

Folder contents: Transcript of interview.

Robert Woods: Robert Woods was born near Gallatin, Tennessee, near Nashville and was one of the boy preachers with Marshall Keeble. He attended the Nashville Christian Institute, where he was sponsored by a wealthy African American doctor in the town and later was the longtime minister of the Monroe Street Church of Christ on the west side of

Chicago. After his retirement, he served as a minister in Villa Rica, Georgia. In the interview, he focuses on the differences in the relationship between blacks and whites in eastern Tennessee as compared to the western part of the state where the Ku Klux Klan dominated. His grandparents were not slaves and his grandfather was raised and supported by his white father. Much of the interview focuses on the beginnings of the Church of Christ in Gallatin, early preachers in the area, including Marshall Keeble and Marion F. Holt. Woods discusses his own experiences at the Nashville Christian Institute.

Folder contents: Summary transcript.

Subject Tracings:

Race relations – Church of Christ
History - Church of Christ
African American history – Church of Christ
Restoration Movement - history
G.P. Bowser
Marshall Keeble
Silver Point School – Tennessee
Southwestern Christian College – history
Southern Christian Institute – history
Christian Echo
Civil Rights
Joseph Campau Church of Christ
R. Vernon Boyd
Norman Adamson
Carl Baccus
Mrs. Walter Balloon
John R. Flowers
Susy Minor Bynam (Mrs. D.J.)
Samuel Garner
Mattie Garner

Richard Nathaniel Hogan
Andrew Clarence Holt
Sam Holt
Marion F. Holt
Thelma Bowser Holt
Levi Kennedy
John Kolb
Floyd Rose
G. E. Steward
Carl Swanigan
Orum Lee Trone
John Steve Winston
Robert Woods
Parson Ricks
Alexander Campbell (African American evangelist)