



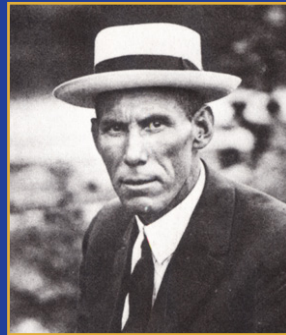
ONEIDA MOUNTAINEER

www.oneidaschool.org

A bi-monthly newsletter of Oneida Baptist Institute

January/February 2024

Celebrating
125
YEARS
1899-2024
Education for Time & Eternity



“The idea was to give the children religious education ... till they learned how to love one another and forgot how to hate.”

—James A. Burns,
Founder
Oneida Baptist Institute

From the Beginning until Now—The Story of Oneida Institute Written for the First Time by Its Founder

(Excerpts taken from the article written by J.A. Burns in the January, 1924 issue of *The Oneida Mountaineer*)

On Jan. 1, 1900, the doors of Oneida Institute were opened for the first time. The enrollment was 100—splendid young men and women and children just scintillating promise and possibility. Some of these had walked as far as four miles and had waded mud and mountain streams.

It was the materialization of a vision which for weary, troublous years had hovered dimly on the distant horizon of hope. A few of us had read in this vision the overthrow of illiteracy, and with it the emancipation of the mountaineers from the thralldom of moonshine, feuds and lawlessness. The idea was to give the children religious education; to keep them in vital touch, in the same classes, till they learned to love one another and forgot how to hate; to teach them the meaning of the “Golden Rule.”

There were four teachers. We charged one dollar per month for tuition. Few were able to pay this. ... We often found it necessary to dig our own coal from the mountain sides and carry it to our classrooms. As teachers, we made a covenant to work till the end of each month, pay imperative demands when we could, and if there should be anything left over to divide it equally among ourselves. ... The average salary was 14 dollars per month. Those were days to try the souls of men.

(Burns continued next page)



The start of a New Year is traditionally a time of reflection, remembering the past and making new plans for the future. As Bible believers, we follow examples we see in scripture of recalling God’s past goodness and provision, and allowing this to fuel our faith and belief that God will continue to provide for His people and His plans going forward.



As we head into 2024, we look back on not just 2023 but on the school’s miraculous founding and God’s faithfulness to sustain OBI for 125 years. We continue to build to meet the needs of today’s students knowing that God will continue to bless this ministry by working through His people.



We hope you enjoy this issue and the recounting of the early days of OBI in the words of founder J.A. Burns. Thank you for your continued support and prayers!

—Larry A. Gritton, Jr., OBI’s 12th President

(Burns continued from p. 1)

Our first Board of Trustees were native mountaineers, representing warring factions. Some of them bore scars received in feud battles. Half of them could not write their names on the charter, made their "marks" instead. It was an indigenous movement, an uprising of mountaineers themselves.

From every viewpoint of human reason this enterprise would certainly be a dismal failure. We were 40 miles from any railroad. We had no friends, no money, no influence. The "Baker-Howard Feud" was raging all around us. ... We had no buildings of any kind. Truly, our only hope was in God who had, "according to his own purpose," given us faith enough to "walk blind, to the darkness before from the darkness behind."

First, we must have a schoolhouse. So we built one. We had vast forests and a little sawmill. ... We worked in the daytime, often at night. We slept in the shavings under our work-benches while we kept the fires continuously burning to



McMurray Hall, the first building, was built in 1899 as a one-story building and was enlarged and given a second story in 1903. It was named for H.L. McMurray, a Baptist preacher from Kansas and co-founder of Oneida Institute.

season our lumber.

The first epoch in development was the friendship and timely aid of Dr. Carter Helm Jones and the Marvins of Louisville, and the LeComptes of Lexington. The Women's Societies and the Sunday Schools have always been most sympathetic and helpful.

The next epoch began with the friendship and help of some members of Madison Avenue Baptist Church, New York City. During these two epochs most wonderful progress was made. We acquired buildings and lands valued at \$150,000. ... The enrollment



Photo c. 1906—Community members who helped to build, donated money or land or were charter members of OBI's Board of Trustees. Left to right: unknown man/boy, Alfred "Lapper" Burns, unknown man, Robert Carnahan, Martha Coldiron Hogg, Isham Hensley, Frank "Big Boozer" Burns, Nelson Gay, Paralee Gilbert Hensley, Squire Hensley*, Elija Gay, W.D. "Bill" Ponder* and "Big" Henry Hensley.

*Great-grandfathers of Barkley Moore, OBI's 9th president.

at Oneida was over the 300 mark. But each year we were forced to turn away more than we enrolled.

Then the European War began, a terrible disaster. It took all our boys 18 years and over. It greatly reduced our support from friends. We found our School with a pressing debt of \$27,000.

But we just could not quit. Lecture Bureaus very kindly gave me employment, and every lecture was my best possible effort to ... enlist new friends for our School. I traveled day and night, winter and summer, in every state in the Union—the most strenuous years of my life. The working force at home, by self-sacrifice and privation kept the School alive. Three years were employed in this way, and at our commencement, 1917, the School was free

from debt. Every heart was full of gratitude.

But this was the year our Nation was drawn into the World War, the 3rd epoch in the history of our School. The cost would be inconceivable, and money for the support of our School would be almost impossible. ... What lone, weary years of toil and anxiety! But still we labored on, and at last the German guns went mute, and we looked with astonishment upon a distraught world. Our School was alive, barely breathing, ... its hope almost gone.

Thus we entered upon our 4th epoch ... to reestablish credit and confidence, to build up our work again. We must find someone to take the helm ... and I must continue to work with the Lecture Bureaus. We owed \$30,000. It must be paid, running expenses must be met, our old friends must be won back and new friends must be enlisted. This

was the darkest of all our days—the period of reconstruction.

In vain our Board of Trustees endeavored to find a new man to act as President. ... There was talk of selling school property to pay the debts. ... At last, after a fruitless meeting of the Board, one of the trustees returned to his home, discouraged, and said, "I believe Oneida Institute is doomed. We have failed to find a competent man who will accept the place." His daughter said, "Why don't you get Mrs. Russell? If anyone on earth is big enough and brave enough, it is she." This girl had been educated in Mrs. Russell's school at St. Helens. This was a new idea, maybe an inspiration. All had been thinking of men—no one

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(Burns continued from p. 2)



Marvin Hall, named for Dr. and Mrs. J.B. Marvin of Louisville, was completed in 1902. Melvin Davidson, for whom today's chapel is named, taught Bible in Marvin Hall from the late 1940's through 1961.

had thought of a woman.

I did not know Mrs. Russell, but I had heard of her work. She seemed our only hope. I begged her to accept the position, pledged my help and cooperation. Mrs. Russell ... began her work in April, 1922. At once the atmosphere cleared and hope revived. She seemed to radiate courage and confidence. This 4th epoch has been a short one, only 21 months. But what wonders have been wrought! The dormitories have been renovated, ... every penny of the debts paid, credit fully reestablished, and there is a surplus of nearly \$100.00 with which to start the year 1924. This is the first time we have ever had a surplus in the whole 24 years. There is cooperation and unity everywhere—the Trustees, the Faculty, the students, the friends and helpers, at home and abroad, all are a unit in prayers and efforts for the future of Oneida Institute.

This is a glorious ending for the 4th epoch. But let us never be elated with success. Let us be humble and grateful. Let us remember that ... "the battle is the Lord's."

And now we come to the 5th epoch of development. There is a clarion call to bigger, better things. It challenges our courage. It demands

our earnest consecration to renewed effort, to strengthen our stakes and lengthen our cords.

In God's own time and place, a great business man was born, one of the Lord's stewards. ... The Lord put money in his hands and His spirit was in his heart. This man says he will furnish \$50,000 for a new building if we furnish the same amount. Of course the friends of our School will raise this money; the Lord has many stewards.

Oneida Institute shall have room for many of the needy students we have been forced to turn away. Since God has blessed us with this wonderful opportunity, we must all do everything in our power to make the most of it. It will require united effort and sacrifice. God's opportunities are ... always fields of labor, consecration and sacrifice.

And now I start on my long, long journey which will take me all the way to the Pacific Coast and back again, if God wills. ... Remember that I shall be working in the fullest confidence that the noble friends will never suffer our School to come under the tyranny of debt again.

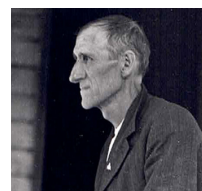
This is the beginning of the 5th epoch. What shall the end be? We cannot know. We can only trust and try our very best, leaving the results in the hands of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will.

J.A. Burns. (1865-1945)
Oneida, Ky., Jan. 1, 1924.



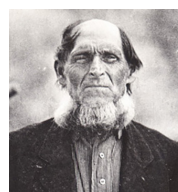
Older students in front of Marvin Hall, app. 1913. The bell housed in the bell tower was a gift of the First Baptist Church, Carrollton, Ky.

A Few Key Figures in OBI's Founding



Levi "Lee" Combs (1859-1909) A feud leader who stood up and spoke up for peace at the charter meeting with Burns and rival feudists. Combs was a member of the first Board of Trustees. His grandson, former Kentucky Governor Bert T. Combs, attended OBI in the 1920's.

Martha Bowling Coldiron Hogg (1846-1915) A widow, "Granny" Hogg donated the 10-acre knoll on which OBI was built.



"Big" Henry Hensley (1843-1929) A farmer and father of 14 children (and later 109 grandchildren) who sold most of his hogs in order to make the first cash donation of \$50 toward the building of the School. The oldest grandchild, Irvin Hensley, was present as a student on the opening day of Oneida Institute. Irvin was a member of OBI's Board of Trustees in 1943. He and his son, Golden, a 1934 OBI graduate, operated a mercantile store in the Oneida community.

Robert Carnahan, Jr. (left) and **Dr. J.B. Marvin**



In 1905, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Carnahan, Jr. funded the majority of a new 23-room brick girls' dormitory which housed 50 girls. The total cost of the project was \$10,000. Ladies' societies aided in furnishing the rooms and about \$2,000 came from other donors. "Bob" Carnahan, Sr. was a member of the first Board of Trustees and had given a donation of \$25 in 1899. Robert, Jr. became a successful lumberman and moved to Louisville.

The first brick building in or near Oneida, Marvin Hall was made possible with a gift of \$5,000 from Dr. and Mrs. J.B. Marvin. Upon the completion of Marvin Hall, McMurray Hall, OBI's original school building, was converted into a boys' dormitory.



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OBI Welcomes New Track & Field Coach



Mitch Hawkins

Email: mitch.hawkins@oneidaschool.org

About Coach Hawkins:

Married for 27 years and the father of an adult son, Hawkins is a Clay County resident who spotted OBI's new track and field while driving through Oneida. "I saw that new track, and I thought, 'I do miss coaching!'" he laughed.

Hawkins is recently retired from public school where he was a track and field head coach for eight seasons. When he learned that OBI was looking for a track coach, he contacted Mr. Gritton. He explained, "I do remote work now, and I missed being around people, especially being around kids who I can help. I hope I'm a good influence on them; that's my goal." Hawkins added that his

goal for the 2024 OBI season is "to field a complete team and to be competitive in every event." The team has been hard at work already with KHSAA-allowed conditioning starting in January.

OBI president Larry Gritton, Jr., stated, "We are thrilled to bring Coach Hawkins aboard. He loves the Lord, loves young people, and I know he will help elevate our track program to elite status. The combination of our current student-athletes, the ability to now build from the bottom up with our elementary students, our amazing new facility, and Coach Hawkins' expertise leads me to believe tremendous days lie ahead for the OBI track and field program. God is good!"

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 We post current campus news and student achievements with photos on our social media pages. Take a look!



Bits & Tidbits

Contact us: 606-847-4111

Mark your calendars:

- February 24-March 1
49th District Basketball Tournament at OBI
- October 19, 2024—Homecoming

To order OBI history books

Mail a check with a note including your selections, name, address and phone number. Mail to:

OBI—Attn. Business Office
P.O. Box 67, Oneida, KY 40972

Dawn Comes to the Mountains

\$20.00 + \$6.00 postage

The early years of OBI and Clay County depicted in 130 photos

Mountain Rising

\$16.00 + \$6.00 postage

A biography of J.A. Burns by Darrell C. Richardson, forward by Barkley Moore

The Crucible

\$6.00 + \$4.00 postage

An autobiography by J.A. Burns