



Founded in 1899

ALUMNI NEWS

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Education for Time and Eternity

A newsletter for alumni of Oneida Baptist Institute

March 2010

James Anderson Burns - Founder and First President of OBI

Called "Burns of the Mountains," **James Anderson Burns** was born August 2, 1865 in West Virginia. His father, **Hugh Burns**, a farmer and Primitive Baptist minister, had moved there from Clay County, Kentucky.

After his first wife died, Hugh married **Elizabeth Collins**. James had three older siblings, **Robert**, **William** and **Elizabeth**. The nearest school was eight miles away so the Burns children studied in the evenings after chores. They learned to read from the Bible and an almanac. At night they gathered around the fireside while Hugh read Bible stories and prayed.

At age 14 James learned that a new school was being built three miles away. He wanted to go, but had no money for books. He spent his summer digging ginseng roots and earned enough money to buy books and his first pair of store-bought shoes.

By age 16 James had completed the school's curriculum, but what he wanted most was to learn about Kentucky. When he asked why they had left, his father told him about the feuds. James felt that his father had left their relatives to fight the battle alone and said, "I'm going to Kentucky." His father made him promise to wait a year. A week later Hugh died from a heart attack. The next year, 1883, James and his mother moved to the old "Burns Homestead" near Oneida.

Soon after Burns arrived in Clay County his only living uncle took him to the family graveyard. Pointing to the graves, his uncle told him stories of the untimely deaths their relatives had suffered. Burns left with a burning determination to avenge their deaths.

For the next four years, Burns



earned an almost legendary reputation in logging and feuding. Then an event occurred that would change the direction of his life. He and several of his relatives attacked a cabin on Newfound Creek.. Burns was hit over the head and left for dead. In *The Crucible* he wrote, "When I regained consciousness...I went to the top of a mountain and spent two days in lonely vigils. On the third day I slept. When I woke up...the urge of vengeance was gone and peace reigned within. I was determined that the feuds should be stopped."

Burns returned to West Virginia, made a public profession of faith in Christ and was baptized. He began to preach, following in his father's footsteps. The Baptist Education Society encouraged him to go to Dennison University in Granville, Ohio. After attending Dennison for seven months, Burns returned to Kentucky in 1892. From 1893-1897 he taught in Clay County public schools. During the school year 1897-1898 Burns taught at Berea College, where he met **Rev. H.L. McMurray**.

They became close friends and Burns told McMurray about the vision God had given him for the children of the Clay County mountains. McMurray agreed to return with him.

Burns married **Martha Sizemore** in 1897. They had six children--**Myrtle**, **Dugger**, **Dixie**, **Holly**, **Robert** and **Marvin**.

Perhaps the climax of the Burns saga was the meeting of the clans in the old mill near Oneida. Around 50 men from both sides of the feud gathered to hear Burns speak about his dream of building a Christian school. He said, "We've been teaching our children to hate each other for more than a hundred years. Let's teach them to love each other and then we will have peace. Let's join together to build a school and teach our children the story of our Saviour's love." After several minutes of silence two men, **Lee Combs** and **Frank Burns**, from opposite sides of the feud came to the middle of the room and shook hands. At that moment, a school was born.

Burns and McMurray went up Sandlin Hill, climbed an oak tree, looked down on Oneida and picked a site for the school. The knoll they selected was owned by **Martha Cold-iron Hogg**, who donated the property. Soon after Burns laid the cornerstone, men came from both sides of the feud

(See **Burns**, page 4)

We now have a short informational DVD on our web site:
www.oneidaschool.org

An open letter from Aaron Smith, OBI student 1969-1971

Hi Myrtle,

I have been wanting to write a brief story of how Oneida affected my life, but I have been taking care of my wife who passed away this past December.

In 1969 I was living with my father, Charles C. Smith, as he and my mother, Toni Smith, had divorced. My life was chaos. I pretty much came and went as I pleased. My grades were terrible. My dad, being a college professor at Cumberland College, was not happy with me even though I had started on the varsity basketball team at Williamsburg High School as a freshman. One day after one of our many arguments, my dad said that I would be going to OBI when school started. He explained that one of his prior students, Joe Barnes, who taught math and coached at Oneida had contacted him and was interested in me coming to Oneida because of the trouble I was in for staying out all night three or four times a week. I made a deal with my dad that I would go to Oneida if he would be proud of me and stay off my back.

In late August, sure enough, I went to OBI, along with my stepbrother Darryl. The first night I was told I could not leave my room after 10:00 p.m. All that evening, I felt like a prisoner and was planning ways to leave and make it on my own. The next morning, I went to breakfast like I was told and met two cool guys from Louisville, KY. After breakfast, we were all sent to the farm to work. We all became friends and I started learning more about the rules, the girls, and the basketball team. Since I was a sophomore, I was allowed to move into the older boys' dorm. Harlan Woods was both the principal and my American History teacher. He must have seen something in me because he took an interest in my welfare. I decided that I would really study. With the help of Mr. Woods and Mr. Barnes--tragically both were killed in car accidents later--I began to have dreams of going to college like my brothers were doing at Berea College. I began to practice with the basketball team even though I was ineligible to play because I had played varsity at Williamsburg the year before.

I worked on the farm for my job under the supervision of the farm manager, Hughie Napier. I learned a lot working on the farm and don't regret one moment. One day, while we were taking a break from picking corn, President Jackson came up where we were having civilized but supervised wrestling. He wanted to know if there was a strong swimmer amongst us farm workers. I raised my hand because I had been a lifeguard at the pool in Williamsburg. He asked me what experience I had and gave me the job of cleaning the new pool in the Student Center. It was a great job and I was even allowed to choose my helper. Of course, I chose my new best friend, Beau Bramble from Louisville.

I liked being at OBI now. I had good friends, a girlfriend, a good job and straight A's, due to help and guidance from Mr. Woods. That summer I worked at a girls' camp in North Carolina and returned to OBI for my junior year in August. I had made enough money to buy my own clothes and have spending money for the first semester.

My dad paid for part of my stay and my working at school helped with any school fees. I started on the basketball team that year. We had 23 wins and 5 losses. Two of the losses were to Clay County, by one point both times. After ball season, Mr. Woods said it might be possible for me to go straight from my junior year into Berea College. I did very well on the ACT, took an entrance exam at Berea and was admitted to Berea College for the fall of 1971. At age 20, I graduated from Berea in December 1974 with a major in history and political science.

In January 1975, Barkley Moore, OBI's president, hired me to coordinate a 13-county regional spelling bee to be held at Oneida in May and to teach Spanish II (I had 12 hours at Berea). I traveled to every elementary school in the region, promoting the spelling bee to 5th grade students. I also drove President Moore all over the state as he spoke about Oneida.

I took the LSAT (entrance exam for Law School) and was accepted into the University of Kentucky Law School. I got married and when my wife, Virginia, was pregnant in 1977 I dropped out of law school to work full-time as an officer at the Blackburn Correctional Complex in Lexington. After completing my Masters Degree in Criminal Justice at EKU in 1981, I took a job in Frankfort as an Officer at the Frankfort Career and Development Center and then returned to Blackburn with Kentucky Department of Justice. I retired in August, 2004, having worked at Blackburn as a caseworker, dormitory and caseworker supervisor, and finally Deputy Warden and acting Warden on weekends.

After my wife of thirty years suffered a stroke in 2006, I took care of her and my youngest son. As I said, my wife died last December. We had three sons and one daughter. In my spare time, I like to write. Since retiring, I have had two articles published concerning Appalachian living

I'm active in my church and still have fond memories of going to the little church across the road from the boys' dormitory. I play music and I'm almost finished with a music composition and score that will be played with the choir at my church.

I plan to be at Homecoming this year and I'm looking forward to coming back to the school that gave me my first chance and boost in life. God bless all who have and will attend OBI as well as those who give their time and money to the school.

Aaron D. Smith
Lexington, KY

Dear Friends,

At Homecoming this year we will be honoring and unveiling the portrait of Oneida's first president, **James Anderson Burns**. The article in this issue gives the main highlights of his life. If you haven't already read *The Crucible* and *Mountain Rising*, I recommend that you do so. Both can be purchased from the school's gift shop.

We continue to look for direct descendants of Burns who can be at Homecoming and participate in the unveiling of his portrait. If you know of any, please let us know.

Richard Burns, a great-great nephew of J. A. Burns and former OBI choir and band director will be leading the hymn sing at the church.

All former basketball players are invited to play in the alumni game, even versus odd years, at 1:00 p.m. in the Sparks Gym. Bring tennis shoes and light colored shirt for odd years, dark shirt for even years.

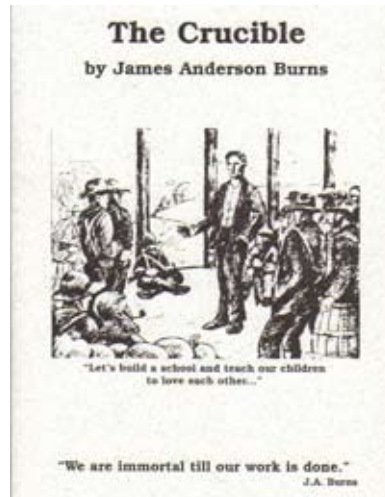
I hope you saw the announcement in the *Oneida Mountaineer* about the Alumni and Friends dinner and play on March 27. If you haven't called saying you plan to come, it's not too late. Also, don't forget, nominations for the Athletic Hall of Fame are due April 1.

This is the last *Alumni News* you will receive before Homecoming. Dr. Underwood will be sending his letter in May with the schedule of events. Mark your calendar now: **June 26, OBI Homecoming**. We look forward to seeing you.

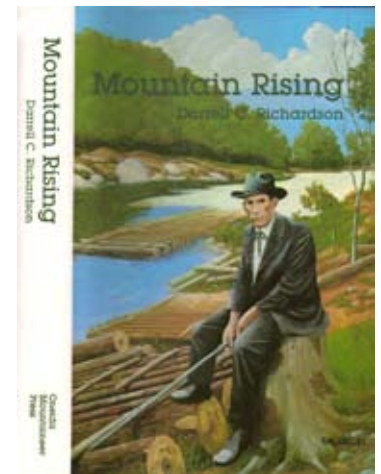
Sincerely,
Myrtle Webb Cooke '60
OBI Alumni Director
(606) 847-4111 ext. 268

In Memoriam 2009
(additional names)

- Gary Garrett, OBI houseparent
- Ethel Bowling Napier, student 1920's
- Manley Combs '39
- Kathleen Byrd Craycraft '53
- Ruth Grubbs '67
- Kelvin Wells '93



The Crucible, by **James Anderson Burns**, tells the story of Oneida Baptist Institute from the pen of the founder himself. Burns shared the struggles and accomplishments he and his staff experienced during the early years of the school, 1899-1923. The one thread that permeates Burns' story is the miraculous hand of God providing daily for His children as they did His work. *The Crucible* was first published in 1928. □



Mountain Rising, by Darrell C. Richardson, is the story of James Anderson Burns and Oneida Institute. It begins with tales of Burns' boyhood in West Virginia, his days as a feudist in Clay County, and the change of heart that led him to found OBI. Richardson traces the growth of the school through the terms of presidents Burns, **Adams, Russell, Goins, Houchell** and **Sparks**. □

Homecoming 2010

The following classes will have special reunions at Homecoming on June 26. Individual class letters will be going out soon. We hope you can join us for this very special day!

- 1940.....70 years
- 1945.....65 years
- 1950.....60 years
- 1955.....55 years
- 1960.....50 years
- 1965.....45 years
- 1970.....40 years
- 1975.....35 years
- 1980.....30 years
- 1985.....25 years
- 1990.....20 years
- 1995.....15 years
- 2000.....10 years
- 2005.....5 years

Alumni Notes

- Brandon Bowman '91**
Bristol, Virginia
Brandon owns his own business, Bowman Heating and Cooling. He and his wife, Tamara, have one daughter, Mariah, 17, and a one-year-old son, Bonham.
- Brenton Jones '99**
Manchester, Kentucky
Brent has a son, Gunner, born April 30, 2009. Brent works for the Kentucky Transportation Department in Clay County.
- Joey Jaspersen '04**
Oneida, Kentucky
Joey is our new health & P.E teacher. He graduated from EKU May 2008, with a major in Criminal Justice. In December 2009, he completed his Master's Degree in Recreation and Park Administration.
- Anu Bold Layne '05**
Chatanooga, Tennessee
Anu married Charles Layne, Jan. 2, 2010. She graduated from the University of the Cumberlands in December 2009.

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(Burns, continued from page 1)

to help build their school. "**Big Henry**" **Hensley** gave fifty dollars and **Robert Carnahan** gave twenty-five. Others brought lumber. The men often worked 'til midnight and slept on shavings. Burns had announced that the school would open on January 1, 1900. By Christmas they still needed 400 feet of lumber. Then **Frank Burns** crossed the frozen river in his wagon loaded with logs he had removed from the loft of his cabin. The school opened as planned January 1, 1900.

When the board of trustees met on December 20, 1899, they named the school Mamre Baptist College and Burns was named the first president. On the opening day of school he read to 100 students--boys, girls, men, and women--Psalm 127:1: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it..." The school was now in session with three teachers, Burns, McMurray, and **C.A. Dugger**. Classes ranged from grades one through eight. Tuition was \$1.00 a month. Only a few were able to pay cash. Others brought farm animals, produce or coal dug on the family farm.

In the spring of 1900 **Dr. Carter Jones** invited Burns to speak to the State Board of Missions meeting in Louisville. As a result, Broadway Baptist Church pledged to send \$70 a month to the school. When Dr. Jones invited Burns to Louisville in 1901 to meet with **Dr. and Mrs. J. B. Marvin**, Burns told them about the need for a larger building. A few days later Dr. and Mrs. Marvin sent \$5,000. The new building was completed in 1902 and named Marvin Hall in their honor.

As the enrollment grew, Burns turned students away because they

couldn't find lodging in nearby homes. In 1905 he arranged to start the construction of a girls' dormitory while he raised the money. He made the rounds across the state to any church that would listen to his story. Burns said in *The Crucible*, "Somehow the payrolls were always met. Bob Carnahan took care of any overdrafts. In due time Carnahan Hall was completed and a home for 50 girls was provided."

In 1908 Oneida Baptist Institute (the name had been changed in 1904) had its first graduation. Five men received high school diplomas. The teachers had studied at night in order to teach them during the day. All five went to Georgetown College, where they were put in the sophomore class.

After hearing Burns speak in New York City, **Elizabeth Anderson** gave \$5,300 to buy a farm. A year later in 1911, Anderson donated \$11,000 for the construction of Anderson Hall.

An article, "Burns of the Mountains" written by **Emerson Hough**, appeared in *American Magazine* in 1912. Hough told how Burns had stopped the feuds and built a school for the mountain children in Clay County. Speaking invitations came from everywhere. The Chautauqua and Lyceum Lecture Bureaus offered to pay Burns a salary, railroad fare and expenses. Burns delivered over 4,000 lectures in almost every state. Listeners were captivated, and many gave donations.

In October 1920 Burns suffered a mental and physical breakdown due to overwork and complications from influenza. **Thomas Adams** had served as Associate President since 1917 and was named president in 1921. The school was in major financial trouble.

Neither Adams nor the teachers had received salaries for over a year when Adams resigned in January 1922.

Sylvia Russell was named president in April 1922. With the help of **Charles Goins**, Russell was able to bring the school out of financial crisis. Burns resumed his lecture tours in June 1923. He met his second wife, **Margaret Benner**, on a tour. They were married February 14, 1925 and **James Benner Burns** was born November 19, 1926.

Mrs. Russell led a campaign to raise funds to build a home for the Burns' family. The new house was constructed on the hill overlooking the campus where Burns and McMurray had selected the site for the school. Russell resigned in 1928 and Burns served a second term, 1928-1934.

After James Anderson Burns retired in 1934, he moved to Anderson Hall. When he died, the following note was sent to his friends all across the USA: "At 4:00 p.m. September 12, 1945, the forty-seventh year of Oneida Baptist Institute, James Anderson Burns, Founder, Builder, and President Emeritus, passed away in his room in Anderson Hall. The final services were in the school chapel on Friday afternoon with a great funeral oration by Dr. Elmer Gabbard, President of Witherspoon College, Buckhorn, Kentucky. Burial was on Cemetery Hill in Oneida, overlooking the buildings and grounds of the institution into which went his life and through which he forever lives." □

Note: Information for this article was taken from The Crucible by James Anderson Burns and Mountain Rising by Darrell C. Richardson.