

## **Anniversary and Debt Free**

Dr. Solon B. Cousins, professor of Bible and Religion at the University of Richmond and recent pastor of Second Baptist Church, supplied the pulpit for the summer. He later presided over installation services when Samuel Roy Orrell returned to become Oakwood's fifth pastor.

Mr. and Mrs. Orrell were members of Oakwood for a brief period in 1921; he was ordained in the church building; and he supplied the pulpit for about a month prior to the arrival of Mr. Billings. His letter of acceptance was unusual in that it was signed by the four members of the Orrell Family and included the statement, ". . . Remember that there are four of us who accept the call and we only ask that you accept us all for we are pledged to strive together." Mr. Orrell, his wife, twelve year old daughter, and five year old son set the date of their arrival at Oakwood as September 1, 1939.

The new pastor, a man of warm personality, related well to youth and conducted intensive training sessions for the Sunday School and BYPU. The latter expanded to include adults of all ages, and city-wide study courses attracted many Oakwoodians. Mr. Orrell stated, "We are not primarily trying to outdistance others, but we are hoping to prepare a place where people may be trained for Christian service that will keep a pace or two ahead of any training in the secular world. We know that our church must be prepared to lead a trained world."

Building fund emphasis time always occurred in July and with summer vacations it was often difficult to raise sufficient dollars to retire on time portions of the notes due. In September 1940 the Building Fund Committee started preparing for 1941 by announcing a Mile of Pennies Campaign. At specified times members would empty their pockets of all pennies and place them side by side on the front of the pulpit and baptistery. At the end of the calendar year 6,043 pennies of the 84,480 needed were stockpiled, but six months remained to reach the goal.

In 1940 Oakwood also decided to join the growing trend among churches and hire a non-member as organist. Kathryn Waymack (Mrs. Charles Wakefield), who began as volunteer organist for morning worship in 1937, brought out the question when she received an invitation to become a paid soloist in another church. A majority of the congregation objected seriously to remunerating any member to perform services for the church and accordingly set a policy which remained in effect until 1946. It was broken then because the paid organist unexpectedly left his post during the invitational hymn and presented himself for membership. Julia May Nicholas (Mrs. A. P. Gates, Jr.) was elected morning organist to replace Miss Waymack for the interim period. Edith Wilson (Mrs. T. Kinsey Williamson), who served as assistant pianist and pianist for twelve years in the earlier days and as pianist or organist for night services beginning in 1935,

continued her position as a volunteer until the arrival of H. C. Duesberry, Oakwood's first paid musician.

On New Year's Eve the first Watch Night service was held in the church under the sponsorship of the Baptist Training Union (formerly BYPU). One hundred persons participated in welcoming in that momentous year, 1941.

It was birthday time and on January 19, 1941, the church celebrated the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of its organization. A history, compiled by the church historian, Mrs. Bessie Dickenson Reid, was printed in paper back form. The Silver Anniversary offering was used to redecorate the sanctuary. Pastor Orrell welcomed guests, visiting speakers, and former members while Dr. Cousins brought the morning message. The spirit of anniversary carried into the evening services and emphasized the church's interest in youth. Dignitaries of the State Baptist Training Union participated.

The Reverend James R. Bryant, assistant to the secretary of the State Baptist Board of Missions and Education who frequently through the years advised various Oakwood pulpit committees, put his feeling on the occasion into writing:

“ . . . Oakwood Avenue has stood thus far as a mighty monument towering above all selfishness and sin for the glory of God and the salvation of lost men. Her compass has always pointed toward the Cross and with the help and encouragement of the members she will continue to give forth her ray of hope. Her light will show men that things really worthwhile are things spiritual. . . .”

Later in the year the grounds surrounding the church were landscaped, and the north boundary was fenced; church baseball became church softball as the new less expensive sport was introduced to Richmond; a Saturday night bowling league was initiated; and sufficient palm leaf fans to place at least two in every hymn book rack were purchased for the sum of ten dollars.

Attention throughout the Nation switched abruptly near the end of Oakwood's Silver Anniversary year. During the afternoon of December 7 radios in the community blasted forth the startling news that Pearl Harbor, the United States Naval Base in the Hawaiian Islands, was under attack by Japanese bombers. That evening services were well attended in most churches because members gathered, as they would do many times in the next years, to pray that God would direct the leaders of the country and protect its citizens and military men. Before peace came some five years later, seventy-four Oakwood men and one young woman served their country in the Armed Forces and all returned home safely.

But those who stayed at home fought equally well. Oakwood members individually and as a congregation supported wholeheartedly their city's efforts in defense and in the social welfare of servicemen.

Oakwood girls took a turn before war came as hostesses for the Baptist drop-in center for servicemen located downtown at Second Baptist Church. They continued their schedule throughout the period and in the Korean and Viet Nam confrontations. One young lady of the church was requested to accept a short term position to write magazine and newspaper articles and columns on the city's activities for the military and civilian defense volunteers. One young man, returned from service, spent hundreds of hours conducting servicemen's tours of historic Richmond. Many homes of members became temporary homes for the men away from home.

Other church members worked long at Civilian Defense activities by training for air raid wardens, auxiliary police and firemen, and block leaders. Nearly every family had its own version of a Victory Garden, and many ladies rolled bandages, knitted, and received first aid and home nursing instruction through the Red Cross. The church itself mailed the Testaments and devotional materials to its members and friends in service as it did during the First World War when twelve stars appeared in its service flag. Various groups devoted hours to preparing and packing food parcels. No serviceman visited the church without receiving an invitation to dine in a member's home.

Although the early days of the war were scary as citizens wondered when bombs would come, life at the church continued normally. In January of 1942 the Sunday school discontinued general opening exercises and permitted each department to set its own assembly program.

August 30, 1942, brought another moment of decision. The congregation refused to consider a resignation and instead granted Mr. Orrell leave of absence for the duration of the war to enter the chaplaincy of the United States Army. Three receptions by various groups marked his farewell. The Reverend George Clifton Patterson, a member of the congregation and teacher in a neighborhood school, also served as an Army chaplain.

When her husband left, Mrs. Orrell was named Church Visitor and received a nominal salary. She held the position until September 1944. The Board of Deacons in January 1943 recommended that five ladies be appointed as Deaconesses to assist with visiting and other church matters. Mrs. Leslie E. Brooks, Mrs. Eddie B. Cosby, Miss Allie Bond, Mrs. R. Archie Puckett, and Mrs. Earl G. Reid accepted this new responsibility.

In the fall of 1943 as the church was about to complete its most successful financial year, the congregation happily burned the final note of indebtedness on the building at Chimborazo Boulevard and P Street. Dr. John Walter Cammack, who was supplying the pulpit, presided at the special service while R. Carter Ransone was principal speaker. Chaplain Orrell, who was unable to obtain leave from his post in Ohio, remembered the occasion with a telegram.

But the church was already looking toward expansion. It had started a unique campaign for a new educational building by purchasing a War Bond in honor of each member whose name appeared on the service board in the vestibule of its sanctuary.