

A Report on the Various International (Foreign) Mission Board Buildings

April 1959

Mr. L. Howard Jenkins gave the following talk:

REMINISCENCES AND APPRECIATIONS

This paper is written according to specifications dictated by the Dedication Committee. This Committee suggested that in view of the fact that the history of the several homes of the Board had been reviewed on several occasions, that instead of a historical sketch of these former homes, it would be more appropriate and interesting if I should relate some personal experiences associated with these previous quarters. This opens the door pretty wide but I shall try not to abuse this privilege and I hope that what I say shall be a correct interpretation of what the Committee had in mind.

To begin with, let me say that this is the eighth **location** and I have served in five of these, as I will enumerate later. I am glad to say that I do not have any knowledge of the first three.

Just in passing let me say that in 1847 the Board moved to its first permanent quarters in a back room of the old First Baptist Church at 12th and Broad Streets where it remained until 1871. Incidentally, the first President of the Board, Dr. J. B. Jeter, married my mother and father. In 1872 the Board moved its offices to an upstairs room over Ellyson's Store adjoining the present Travelers Building. The next **location** was the Wilkerson Home at Ninth and Franklin Streets. In 1888 The Board moved its office to what was then known as the Merchants National Bank Building where it remained until 1918. This is where I take over. The first meeting of the Board I attended was in the office of this building. Dr. Tupper had referred to these quarters as "spacious quarters" but they were anything but that. There were three small rooms but, in reality, there was only one room. The Corresponding Secretary, Assistant Secretary, and a clerk occupied the space. At that time the Treasurer of the Board was not a full-time officer but carried on his own business on the first floor of the same building and from time to time did the work required of him as Treasurer.

To "personalize" this office, I might say this. The purpose of this called meeting of the Board was to plan for the funeral of our beloved Secretary, Dr. R. J. Willingham. That day was the first day of limited parking on Main Street. When I came out, there was a ticket on my car, much to my distress. I was in court the next morning and was held up as a horrible example. The judge of the court was

a member of my church and I think he took particular delight in fining me \$5.00 if I may Judge from the smile on his face when he rendered this verdict. That is the way Baptists treat each other sometimes!

The older missionaries had a way of calling the Headquarters of the Board the "Board Rooms." That was a correct description of the so-called "Quarters" for it is about all we possessed, just several rooms; but I hardly think they would refer to this magnificent and spacious building as the "Board Rooms." Surely we have traveled a great distance in the last 25 or 30 years.

These Quarters, having become too cramped, we moved to the Presbyterian Building on Sixth Street, where we occupied all of one floor. Our Board used their Chapel for meetings by permission of the Presbyterians. They were very kind in their attitude, but in spite of our good influence, they still were Presbyterians when we moved. The Board employed only eight people at that time.

Many things come to mind as I think of what occurred in this Building. To "personalize" more, it was here that I was elected President of the Board. I was so stunned that it was only after ten hours of prayer and deliberation and conferences with my predecessor, Dr. R. E. Gaines, my wife and others that I accepted. I left the morning session about 10 o'clock and did not return until the night session, when I told them of my acceptance although I had told them at the morning session that I would not accept even if elected.

The late Dr. T. W. Ayers, who served this Board so long in China, told me this story while I called on him at his home in Atlanta. When my election was announced, a Richmond brother, who was not a member of the Board, turned to Dr. Ayers and said, "That is a great mistake." I did not find myself in agreement with this brother on many occasions, but had I known his sentiments on this subject, I would have told him I was in complete agreement.

It was in these Quarters that we started on the road to bankruptcy by adopting a budget of \$3,600,000.00. It was evident at that time that we had not recovered from the depression and the failure of the 75 Million Campaign. Some of us pled with the preachers, trying to impress them with the danger involved in the adoption of such a large budget, but we were told we lacked faith. Our reply was that the Lord gave us common sense as well as faith and if we failed to exercise that virtue in our dealings, He would not save us from our folly.

The result was a debt of \$1,800,000.00 and an interest charge of \$100,000.00 or more a year. We were in the hands of the bank and they were attempting to dictate the financial policies of the Board that we resisted at every turn. It was a low point in Southern Baptist history. We had to bring home about 150 missionaries to the everlasting shame of Southern Baptists. Let us never forget this tragedy in making our plans and policies in the future.

I was elected President in October 1932 and Dr. Charles E. Maddry became Secretary on January 1, 1933. I had never met Dr. Maddry. I was at home enjoying that New Year's holiday when the telephone rang. Dr. Maddry was calling to ask that I come down to his office to see him. I went immediately. I do not remember all that was said but I do remember that as I came into his office, he arose to greet me and said, "Mr. Jenkins, heretofore the president has been a figurehead, but from now on he is to be a working man," and he went on to explain why. He surely was a man of his word. When he was on his foreign trips, I was, in effect, Executive Secretary and had to perform many of the duties of the Secretary with almost daily visits to the office. It was soon evident that these Quarters too were inadequate, so in 1935 we purchased the former Johnston Willis Hospital on the corner of Fifth and Franklin Streets. The purchase of this building was made possible by a gift of \$100,000.00 by Mr. and Mrs. George W. Bottoms of Arkansas. The Board met in the former operating room of the hospital, While the Board performed many operations, and they were not of a surgical nature. As we did not use an anesthetic, perhaps in many of these operations the pain was more than when the doctors performed.

There is one thing in particular that I remember about these quarters. On each December 31st, I would go down and sit in Dr. Maddry's office watching the cash receipts to find out if we were to have a surplus or deficit. One year it seemed that a deficit was inevitable. We were mighty discouraged but just as we were ready to admit defeat, the Treasurer brought in a telegram saying that a certain amount of the Lottie Moon Offering money was on the way and that good news made it possible to close the year in the black by \$250.00. I have loved the good women of the W.M.U. ever since. Our debt to them grows greater every year.

In 1943 we moved again -- this time to 2037 Monument Avenue. This beautiful residence cost \$26,500.00. One of the members of the Board resigned because he thought we paid \$500.00 more than it was worth. Incidentally, we sold 2037-39 Monument Avenue for \$85,000.00, a profit of \$13,500.00. These buildings cost us \$71,500.00 and we have had free use of them all these years. The Wilson Home was one of the best-built residences in Richmond and it was such a perfect fit that it seemed to some of us that Mr. Wilson had built the home for the Foreign Mission Board and only occupied it temporarily as his residence. But, after a few years it was evident that we needed more space and the Carneal Home at 2039 was purchased in 1948. A brick passageway joined the two buildings and a Chapel was erected at 2039 that was used for Board meetings. The most notable event, taking place in this building, in my humble opinion, was the election of Dr. N. Theron Rankin as Executive Secretary. I wish I had time to tell you how his election came about and how evident that it was a direct leadership of the Lord.

Our present efficient and beloved Secretary, Dr. Baker J. Cauthen, was elected Secretary in the residence at 2039.

This magnificent project was first mentioned at the April meeting, 1953, and even then we postponed action until October 1953, so it has been on the way six years. No one can accuse us of undue haste. Dr. J. H. Buchanan has the high distinction of being the first one to mention the need for a new headquarters building. He felt that there was a desperate need for us to provide more adequate facilities for the staff to do its work and he felt that Southern Baptists had a desire to provide such a building.

I wish time permitted me to mention all the members of the several building committees that have been appointed from time to time, but I shall mention only two who served during the actual construction of the Building. Dr. W. O. Vaught of Little Rock, Arkansas, was chairman of the building during all of the time of construction. Dr. Vaught sacrificed much of his time and effort in order to attend the many building committee meetings necessary during the construction of the building.

Then, I wish to mention Mr. P. Earle Wood who was Chairman of the local construction committee and he spent untold hours of devoted service and I wish to pay tribute to him for all he meant to the work during recent months. Another important Chairman was Dr. Herman P. Thomas who headed the Decoration Committee and you only have to take a look around you to see the result of his work and the members of this Committee. I wish to commend all of the men and women who have served so faithfully on these building committees. No one can realize the time and devotion of these good friends unless you observed their work.

After we selected the lot we wanted, it was necessary to deal with the owners. I should like to mention here one who is no longer with us, C. Irving Arnall, who represented us in the purchase of this beautiful and strategic **location** on Monument Avenue. He spent weeks combing the west end for a suitable **location**. When we decided this was where we wanted to build, he found the owners reluctant to sell. By his persuasive powers he broke down this resistance and you can see the results and for this we are deeply grateful.

We took an option on the lot while we dealt with the city authorities concerning a building permit for this type of structure on Monument Avenue. The Building Inspector refused to clear the permit so we had to confer with the City Manager, the City Attorney and other city officials. We felt that we had a strong case because the zoning law permitted any religious, charitable or educational institution to be located on Monument Avenue. We felt that we were in all three of these categories. Irving Arnall, together with our attorney, John C. Williams,

rendered invaluable aid in their approach to the city officials concerning the zoning problems. After we made our case, the City Attorney took it under advisement and shortly thereafter rendered an opinion supporting our viewpoint. We then purchased the lot. We are grateful for the sympathetic consideration of the city officials.

May I say at this point, that I do not believe the City, as a whole, has any idea of what this Board adds to the economic and spiritual life of Richmond. If the Chamber of Commerce had an opportunity to secure an enterprise like this, they would bring all the resources of the city to bear in an effort to bring it to Richmond. This Board adds much to Richmond's prestige and reputation. Our city is known around the world; even in the most remote places the name of Richmond is well known. This is in addition to the economic benefits. We have an income of over \$15,000,000 a year. We employ over 100 people and, with our permanent and transient funds running most of the time from \$14,000,000 to \$16,000,000, you can readily appreciate what it means to the business interests of Richmond.

The Board selected as our architect the firm of Carneal and Johnston and they have been very fine people to work with. I wish to pay tribute to Mr. J. R. Beck, Mr. Miles Cary Johnston, Mr. Cary Johnston, and Mr. J. Ambler Johnston.

The building contract was awarded to J. Kennon Perrin Company. I feel they have done a good structural job and I wish to make special mention of their supervisor, Mr. Johns, who always had a smile regardless of the difficulties. He told me once that he never built a building where more changes were required and I could not dispute that statement for I had said the same thing myself. I think all of you will agree that the interior of this building is a thing of beauty and I wish to pay tribute to Mr. William T. Munford who was our interior decorator. I think he did an outstanding piece of work.

I wish to make my humble and justly deserved tribute to all who have had a part in the erection of this beautiful and spacious building, and to the whole staff who have worked untiringly day and night and to all the members of the Board for their sympathetic support in making our task much easier.

We enter this building with deep gratitude and happiness in our hearts. We sit here today with genuine humility as we dedicate this building to the service of God, in carrying out the great task committed to our hands.