

# HERITAGE HORIZONS

NORTH AMERICAN BAPTIST HERITAGE COMMISSION

*Celebrating a Rich Past . . . Inspiring a Promising Future*

## Reflections

by Randy Tschetter

Once upon a time, the *Heritage Horizons* newsletter was published three or four times per year. Volunteers like Lenore Lang and others devoted much of their time in writing and editing the contents. Currently, with limited staff and a very busy communications office, we publish *Heritage Horizons* on an annual basis. In this issue, I will share some personal history and provide an update on our activities in the past year.

Many years ago, when I was young and inexperienced, I heard a seasoned pastor say that Acts was his favorite book in the Bible. The reason he gave for choosing Acts was its focus on history – the “historical” book of the New Testament. I remember thinking to myself, “How or why would someone be enthralled by history? Give me something practical like the book of James.”

A few years later as a seminary student, in a semester-long seminar on the Book of Acts, this guy who thought history was boring and insignificant began to realize the importance of the stories that led to the formation of the early church and of remembering and retelling our stories. Fast-forward about forty-five years to 2017. My fourteen-year tenure as director of Church and Alumni Relations at Sioux Falls Seminary was ending. As I was considering various “retirement” options, I was asked to serve as the Director of the NAB Heritage Commission, where, ironically, *history* is the heart of our mission. While it is not a position for which I felt well-qualified, nor one to which I aspired, the past six-and-a-half years have been quite rewarding and fulfilling.

The Heritage Commission was officially established at the 1991 Triennial Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and charged with collecting, preserving, and displaying the story of God at work in and through the lives and ministries of the people known as the North American Baptists. The Archives, located in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, are home to thousands of stories that span some 175 years of NAB outreach in North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. The Archival staff (currently, just Randy and Darlene) is available and happy to assist researchers who are seeking information about various churches and individuals.



As plans for the 2024 NAB Triennial Conference in St. Paul, Minnesota, were being formulated, Dr. Harry Kelm and the planning committee presented the Heritage Commission with a large and prominent space near the Conference meeting hall in which to promote the work of the Heritage Commission and to provide an overview of our denominational history. A great deal of time and preparation were involved in: 1) choosing which items to transport and how to arrange an attractive display, 2) designing various posters and displays, 3) creating a template for the display area, and 4) transporting the various items to the St. Paul, RiverCentre. Our display included pulpit furniture from



Fleischmann Memorial Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; a cornerstone from the Rochester Theological Seminary; a 40-pound sculpture of Johann Gerhardt Oncken, father of the German Baptists; a microscope which Dr. Peter Fehr used in his medical practice in Cameroon; a kimono that belonged to and was worn by Florence Miller, an NAB missionary to Japan; and


and a banner in honor of the 50th Anniversary of Bansa Baptist Hospital in 1974.

Additionally, there were photos of missionary housing in Japan, of Conrad Fleischmann, and a variety of plaques and wall hangings.

Five newly-created-posters provided overviews of White Cross ministries, medical missions in Cameroon, God's Volunteers / New Day, the NAB's welcoming of immigrants to North America, and the important ministry of Walter Rauschenbusch.



A large-screen TV was used to share an overview of more than one hundred photos of NAB ministries and personnel. We were blessed and encouraged by the many opportunities we had to share stories about God's people at work in the North American Baptist Conference and to renew old acquaintances and make new friends.

One of the biggest challenges we faced in presenting this display was transportation. Moving pulpit furniture and a 400-pound cornerstone and boxes of books and other artifacts from the archives to a truck was no small task. Special thanks go out to Wayne Fokken and Tim Heerts for their help and advice in Sioux Falls. A special word of thanks also to the NAB Conference staff who assisted in unloading and then reloading the truck in St. Paul. 

# A Missionary Tribute

by Randy Tschetter

The NAB has a long history of sending missionaries to foreign-to-us mission fields. In this edition of *Heritage Horizons*, we pay tribute to the Rev. Dr. Oryn G. Meinerts.




Oryn was born in a snowstorm near Emery, South Dakota, in 1937. He attended school through 8th grade and then seemed content to stay home and herd cattle along the roadside. A year later, with the encouragement of a school superintendent, he returned to finish high school before heading off to college and then to North American Baptist Seminary in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

In 1964, Oryn was commissioned as a missionary to Cameroon by the North American Baptist Conference. He served faithfully as a teacher and principal of a high school, interim senior church pastor, and field director for twenty-seven years. During his tenure, the Cameroon Baptist Convention grew from 12,000 to 80,000 members. In 1985, he was granted a doctor of Missiology degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity Seminary, and in 2001, he was decorated with a medal by the Republic of Cameroon: Knight of the Cameroon Order of Merit – the highest civilian honor granted by the Cameroonian government.

While in Cameroon, Oryn met Patricia (Pat) Heller, a nurse midwife. They were married on August 10, 1968, and they subsequently served together as a team for some thirty years. Upon their return to the United States, Oryn accepted a position as the pastor to Seniors at Tabernacle Baptist Church in George, Iowa. On May 22, 2024, Oryn joined with the saints who have said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness.” (2 Timothy 4:7–8a NIV).

Several of Oryn’s Cameroonian friends and colleagues were present at his memorial, where he was eulogized as a father, pastor, teacher, mentor, hard worker, man of integrity, and servant leader. The pastor shared a letter from Rev. Dr. Nditemeh Charlemagne, current Executive President of the Cameroon Baptist Convention, who wrote: “Oryn taught us that it was possible to be a white American missionary



and at the same time be or become an African. He didn’t look down on us, he ate our local food, dressed like us, made himself one of us. [ . . . ] He saw us as equal image bearers of our creator who deserved human dignity and worth.” 



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