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### Clippinger, Walter Gillan

W. G. Clippinger Jr.

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WALTER GILLAN CLIPPINGER

By W. G. Clippinger, Jr.

Would managing a farm at age 14, teaching in a one-room school at 17, and cutting students' hair to help finance one's education, prepare a man for the presidency of a college? No doubt such experiences contributed to the thirty years Walter Gillan Clippinger was president of Otterbein College.

"A very pleasant day. An heir was born at 4:30 a.m.," wrote Dr. Clippinger's mother in her diary, March 1, 1873, at Lurgan, Pa.

It was when his father was ill, during the harvest season from April until September, that the brunt of the work on their 200-acre farm fell on 14-year-old Walter's shoulders. He had three younger brothers: Smith, Arthur, and Charles, and a sister Florence.

Feats of strength were common on farms of that day. In competition with other boys, young Walter backed up to a farm wagon, grasped a wheel by the spokes and lifted it off of the ground. Many years later he was operated on for hernia which he attributed to this test of strength. He enjoyed telling about blasting that was going on for a railroad tunnel near the

family farm. Many mule-drawn dump wagons filled with rocks passed his home. The railroad road bed and seven tunnels ultimately became the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

He attended a rather primitive school as a child. "When he trudged off to school he was immaculate—his face, hands, and clothes were clean. His hair was combed. His conduct and recitations were perfect. He manifested little interest in athletics. Not that he objected to them—he could not sacrifice the time from his studies to join in them heartily," said his brother Charles.

At an early age he reported for The Public Opinion, a Franklin County (Pa.) newspaper. He signed his contributions "Retlaw"—his given name Walter spelled backwards.

He was an active member of the Lurgan Literary Society, composed mostly of young people, and participated in discussions of civic, educational, and national affairs.

During the summers he attended a special school for teachers at Orrstown, Pa. When he was 17 he started teaching and after four years at Ocker Hill

and Mowersville, he passed three examinations required of teachers--the provisional, the professional, and the permanent. This was in May of 1893. His salary was \$20 a month for a seven month term.

In the fall of 1894, Dr. Clippinger entered Lebanon Valley College at Annville, Pa. Lack of funds was a problem for college students then as today. To improve his finances, he would cut the students' hair. His ability with the barber shears enabled him to save money later by cutting his sons' hair. During summer vacations while in college, he edited the Chautauqua Record, a publication sponsored by the Pennsylvania Chautauqua at Mt. Gretna, Pa.

A lucrative effort was the sale from farm to farm, of The Story of the Bible and the Bible itself. He was unusually successful with these ventures. At one time he sold the Encyclopedia Britannica. This work held good prospects for a successful career had he been willing to follow it.

When he entered college his interest seemed to lean to the study of law. This, no doubt, was because of his love for his ideal, an uncle, Hon. W.

Rush Gillan, a prominent lawyer and judge of Chambersburg, Pa. However, religious education had the stronger appeal. This he followed the rest of his life.

While at Lebanon Valley College, he was a class president, business manager of the first year book The Bizarre, president of the Athletic Association, and business manager of The Forum, a monthly news publication. In 1899 he graduated with a B.A. degree.

His further preparation for the presidency of Otterbein College included his studies at Bonebrake Theological Seminary (now United Theological Seminary) in Dayton, Ohio. In 1903 he graduated with honors with a B.D. degree.

The same year, on May 14, he married Miss Sara Alverda Roop of Highspire, Pa. He was proud of his three children, but never bragged about them.

All were Otterbein graduates and became teachers. The eldest, Donald Roop, is a member of the faculty of Ohio University; Walter Gillan, Junior, a teacher in the Dayton public schools; and Charlotte Louise (Cummins), a teacher in the Cleveland public schools.

From 1903 to 1905, Dr. Clippinger was manager of the U.B. Book Store in Dayton. Then from 1905 to 1909 he was professor of religious education and Practical Theology at Bonebrake Theological Seminary.

It was when he was working on his Ph.D. degree at the University of Chicago that he accepted the presidency of Otterbein College in the spring of 1909--a position he held until his retirement in the summer of 1939.

Two singular facts surround his appointment as Otterbein's president. It was understood that he would be given sabbatical leave to complete his Ph.D. The leave was never granted. On several occasions he expressed deep regret to his family that he never had the opportunity to finish the work for his doctorate.

However, he received honorary degrees of D.D., LL.D., and L.H.D. from Otterbein and Lebanon Valley Colleges. Most people referred to and addressed him as "Doctor" Clippinger.

The second fact worthy of note is that no inauguration was held once he took over the college presidency. Without the slightest fanfare, he slipped into the president's chair succeeding Rev. Louis Bookwalter.

During the thirty years Dr. Clippinger was president many worthwhile and lasting improvements were made at Otterbein. He completed a campaign for \$100,000, one for \$400,000, and a Diamond Jubilee Campaign for \$1,000,000. Students presented him with a silver loving cup for his work in helping raise \$100,000 in subscriptions toward a \$250,000 endowment fund.

"Dr. Clippinger has given Otterbein high standards of scholarship. He sought all the standardizing agencies in existence. He won their favor and got Otterbein placed in a position so that when he handed out a diploma it was like a gold dollar. It was recognized in the educational world around the world," said Dr. T. J. Sanders at a testimonial dinner honoring Dr. Clippinger when he retired.

McFadden Science Hall, King Hall, Carnegie Library, and the Alumni Gymnasium were constructed during Dr. Clippinger's presidency.

Because of his family background and religious beliefs, he was opposed to drinking, smoking, and dancing. He was conservative (to a fault, some said). This characteristic paid off in many ways, particularly during

the lean years following the depression of 1929. Some colleges closed their doors never to open them again. But wise management on the part of Dr. Clippinger made it possible for Otterbein to come through the depression comparatively unscathed.

He fought a losing battle to prevent sororities and fraternities from being established on the campus. He always referred to them as "social groups". His opposition to them was based on his belief that they were unchristian.

The decline and eventual abandonment of the four literary societies at Otterbein was a deep disappointment to him. He attributed, in part, their disappearance to the fraternities and sororities. Nothing on the campus could offer the valuable training the literary societies afforded, he felt.

Though not fanatical, he was deeply religious. He would kneel at his bed to say his prayers before retiring--even in his declining years.

Grace was always said at the meal table. His children regularly attended Sunday School, morning church service, afternoon young peoples' meeting,



Sunday evening church service, and for a limited time, Wednesday prayer meeting.

Although he was personable, no one was really close to him. He was "all business"---did not have a lazy bone in his body, one person said. Yet he was friendly and possessed a good sense of humor. He commanded the highest respect a man could wish. Even conductors and red caps at train stations knew him and addressed him as "Doctor".

It was necessary that he travel to meet alumni groups, speak on many occasions, and contact wealthy alumni and financial institutions in behalf of the college. Because of this, much of his time was spent away from the campus.

Being constantly on the go, left him with no time for recreation, except perhaps his rose and vegetable gardens. Even these at times seemed a chore, what with weeds and pests plaguing them, especially when he was away from home. During his first year of retirement he took up golf, but never became enthusiastic about the game. Apparently he planned some recreational activity when he moved to Westerville. With him he

took a bicycle, tennis racket, and bamboo fishing rod. No one recalls his using any of them after accepting Otterbein's presidency. On rare occasions he would take a few days off during the summer to pick huckleberries in the mountains around Mt. Gretna, Pa. At the resort there, he would leave his family and return to Westerville to work. Never did he take a regular annual vacation. Once, by himself, he went on a Mediterranean cruise to the Holy Land. For the first time while on the trip, he used a camera. A few of his pictures turned out poorly. He jokingly explained that his finger had covered the lens. He made a number of talks, particularly on the Holy Land, after returning from the cruise.

His work was constantly on his mind and he never learned how to relax. As his sister Florence said, "He could be so absorbed in thought that he would not notice anything going on around him. At times we could talk to him and he wouldn't hear us." His capacity for work and his ability to do it were amazing. One of his successors said that he did not know how Dr. Clippinger was able to do so much work as president. After his retirement, "five men were assigned to do what he had done alone."

His handwriting was beautiful. As a student, papers turned in to his

professors were extremely neat and nearly perfect. His signature was made with a graceful flow of the pen which never left the paper except to dot the i's and punctuate his initials.

He always had the appropriate word to speak and write. Busy as he was, he "was very thoughtful of others in writing notes of sympathy or congratulations." Many people were amazed at his vocabulary. Undoubtedly it was based on his study of Greek and Latin.

Frequently he was called upon to speak before various groups. During the latter part of May and the first of June he made many baccalaureate and commencement addresses. To set his audience at ease, he resorted to his repertoire of appropriate jokes. Although he was "all business", he could enjoy a hearty laugh and frequently would top a person with a better story. When he smiled his face lighted up and his ears moved noticeably--his was a broad, warm, full smile.

Certain incidents he experienced were often woven into his speeches and conversation with guests in his home. One he particularly enjoyed, concerned a box he received through the mail in damaged condition at his

office. Sifting out of the package as he carried it home, was a powder which appeared to be fertilizer for his roses. Before he got around to using the "fertilizer", he received a letter saying a package was being sent to him containing the cremated body of a relative of Benjamin Hanby and would he see that her ashes were sprinkled over Hanby's grave in Westerville?

On another occasion he complained about the toughness of the meat he was served for dinner. He removed some of it from his mouth and discovered he had bitten a piece of flesh from his cheek. He had just come from the dentist's office where his face had been anesthetized.

Enjoying fine cars was sort of a hobby with him. Not that he was a car buff—he was not. Mechanically, he knew little about them—his pleasure was in keeping them spotlessly clean and shiny. Before taking a drive, he would dust his car and immediately after returning he would give the car another good dusting. Most of his cars were used—demonstrators he called them. The first one he owned created somewhat of a stir in Westerville. It was a black, seven passenger Hudson Super Six touring car.

Large by even today's standards, it was easily identified by a characteristic half purr, half whistling sound made by the carburetor. He jokingly referred to this second hand car as the "Hudson Superannuated Six". Conservative as he was, he borrowed from a life insurance policy to buy his first car. Many times he remarked how unwise this was, especially with a wife and three children. He never did it again.

Dr. Clippinger and his family lived in an inadequate pre-Civil War house provided by the college. Infrequently he would suggest the need for a larger and more modern house, better suited to the demands of a college president. Efforts toward buying or building better quarters were opposed by a few college trustees and faculty members. Persons sympathetic with the idea said he was too mild-mannered in his request for a house commensurate with his position. He should demand a better house, they said. But this was not his nature. Despite the small size of the president's house, each year Dr. Clippinger and his queenly wife Sara entertained small groups of the faculty at dinner. Another annual social event was the reception for seniors held in Cochran hall. Lady fingers, Nabisco wafers and neapolitan ice cream were the usual dainties served.

In the early years at Westerville, on Sunday afternoons the entire family would ride about town in a horse-drawn carriage rented from a local livery stable. Early in his administration it was not unusual for him to take a walk on Sunday wearing a derby hat and carrying a cane. Or on some Sundays he would stay at home working at his desk eating popcorn or home-made candy.

It was routine for him to eat an apple before retiring. He would slice the apple in small segments with a razor-sharp pen knife. In the lap drawer of his desk he kept a small whetstone he used to sharpen his knife.

It was fascinating to watch him put a needle-like point on a pencil.

Keeping tools clean and sharp was a fetish with him. Perhaps he acquired this characteristic from his father who, in later life, was a cabinet maker.

He literally worked around the clock. After the evening meal perhaps he would work in his garden until dark. Then he would go to his study to work until retiring. Compared to some men he spent little time with his family.

Many students seeking advice would come to his home frequently just before or during the evening meal. But he willingly gave them all the time they needed. In his study where he met with the students, he had a large, personal library.

"Calm under fire" was one of his outstanding attributes. Never did he raise his voice in anger or lose his composure, even when disturbances occurred during a chapel program.

Although not particularly a joiner, he was active in two service clubs-- the Torch Club of Columbus and the Lions Club of Westerville. The horse-play so characteristic of the Lions Club, was especially appealing to him.

He was a frequent contributor to religious and educational magazines and was the author of a book Student Relationships, an orientation course for high school seniors and college freshmen. It was used by various colleges and for a number of years Dr. Clippinger taught an orientation course at Otterbein and used his book as the text. He liked to teach, in fact after his retirement from Otterbein as emeritus president, he continued to teach at the college for two years and served as a supply pastor of the First

7

E.U.B. Church in Westerville for one year.

During his years in public life he served the E.U.B. Church on various boards and committees. He did not, however, confine his work to his own denomination. He was a member of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, the World's Sunday School Association, the International Council of Religious Education, and president of the Ohio Anti-Saloon League.

A faculty testimonial dinner was given Dr. Clippinger, May 27, 1939, honoring him upon his retirement after thirty years as president of Otterbein. On the occasion he was presented with an illuminated scroll on which were the signatures of all living Otterbein professors and members of the administration. Because of a previous heart attack, Mrs. Clippinger was unable to attend.

In anticipation of his retirement, he purchased a house in a beautiful wooded area on South University Street in Westerville. He and his wife looked forward to the time when they could move into the house and live a leisurely retirement. For a precious thirteen months they did. On



July 12, 1940, Mrs. Clippinger died.

For a few years following her death, he maintained his home there. After selling the house he spent his winters at Old's Hall in Daytona Beach, Florida and summers with his children.

A series of strokes left him a semi-invalid. It was while he was living in Dayton that he fell and broke his hip. Twelve hours after being operated upon he died, September 30, 1948. Two funeral services were conducted for him. The first on October 2, at the Euclid Avenue E.U.B. Church where he was a member while living in Dayton. The second service was the following day at the First E.U.B. Church in Westerville. He was buried beside his wife in Otterbein Cemetery in Westerville, and ironically, a few hundred yards from the house he bought for his retirement.

Tributes paid Dr. Clippinger during his lifetime and since his death seem the best way in which to evaluate him. "His administration was characterized by a reserve. He accomplished great things with comparatively little outward display. His energies were devoted chiefly to accumulating endowment, to strengthening the faculty, and to building

up the spiritual foundations.....the welfare of the students was the chief end of the college."--Willard W. Bartlett

He was frugal. One of his secretaries, Verda Evans, said he advised when seeking a hotel, to "choose the best and ask for the lowest priced room.

In this way you will be given a good one."

"Dr. Clippinger is a splendid educator and a grand man in every way, and the whole faculty take after him."--Ohio State Journal

"His financial policies may be summed up in nine words: (college) endowment is foundation; buildings are superstructure; get foundation first."

--Willard W. Bartlett

"He is a pleasant and powerful orator and everything he says reaches the standard of plain common sense."--Columbus Dispatch

"He always stood for what he thought was the highest and best. Sometimes he was misunderstood. He lived and thought for the college. His daring perseverance made possible the large gifts which put the college on a much safer basis." (J.H.H.) S.E. Ohio Outlook

"He has proven himself too big a man to dominate, exhibiting rather the rare skill of developing and using the latent leadership within both board and faculty."--Willard W. Bartlett

".....he left Otterbein in the van of progress, yet at the same time held fast to the ideas which always stamped it as a school to which parents could send their children in confidence that the atmosphere would be christian and wholesome. He came to Otterbein when it was a small institution of modest reputation in its field and left it measurably larger with higher academic standards and soundly financed."--Columbus Dispatch

"He was a great and good man.....great in the sense that he discovered a mission in life and fulfilled it with fidelity and distinction..... good in the sense that he invested his life for the glory of God, the redemption of men, the strengthening of the church, the extension of God's kingdom."--J. Gordon Howard

"He was such a wonderful man, the kind of person who would have been called a statesman if he had been in politics rather than in education.

He gave such dignity to his office, and inspired the greatest respect,

not only among the students, but among his peers in college circles as well. Somehow throughout the years of my association with Otterbein, the shadow of his greatness seems always to have set the pattern for the college and my memories of it.....many hundreds of former students have stood a little taller because of the influence which he engendered. Surely, Otterbein without his guidance in those important years, would have been a lesser institution today."--Mrs. William G. Bale

