

2018

COLLECTION 0119: Olive Bertha Smith Papers on Microfiche, 1919-1988

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OLIVE BERTHA SMITH COLLECTION

AR 856



Prepared by: Taffey Hall, Archivist
Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives
April, 2004

Updated September, 2012

Olive Bertha Smith Collection

AR 856

Summary

Main Entry: Olive Bertha Smith Collection

Date Span: 1913 – 1995

Abstract: Collection documents Bertha Smith's career as a Southern Baptist foreign missionary to China, from 1917 – 1948, the SBC's first missionary to Taiwan, and as the founder and director of the Peniel Prayer Center near Cowpens, South Carolina, a prayer retreat for Christians across the nation.

Size: 7 linear ft. (7 boxes)

Collection #: AR 856

Biographical Sketch

Missionary and prayer center founder, Olive Bertha Smith (affectionately known as "Miss Bertha"), was born November 16, 1888, near Cowpens, South Carolina, to John McClellan and Frances Thorne Smith. The fifth of eight children, Miss Smith was saved September 5, 1905, at age sixteen.¹ She attended Linwood College in North Carolina for one year and transferred to Winthrop College, where she graduated in 1913. She worked as a teacher for one year in an elementary school in Blacksburg, South Carolina. Then she felt the call to the mission field and enrolled in the Woman's Missionary Union Training School in Louisville, Kentucky, graduating in 1916. She served for one year as principal (and also as a teacher) in Spartanburg County, South Carolina at the Cooley Springs School.²

The Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention appointed Smith as a missionary to China on July 3, 1917. She arrived in the Shantung Province, in the northeastern corner of China, and spent much of her initial time learning the Chinese alphabet and language and teaching English classes to Chinese students. After learning Chinese, Smith began teaching in Chinese at a girls' school in Shantung and often opened her home for Bible studies.³

Smith came back to the United States in 1924 for a year of furlough from the mission field. She also trained for one semester at the Biblical Seminary in New York, where she studied under the pastor of London's Westminster Chapel, G. Campbell Morgan.⁴ She returned to China in 1925,

¹ Lewis Drummond. *Miss Bertha: Woman of Revival*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 11.

² Bertha Smith. "Life Sketch of Bertha Smith." Located in box 6, folder 12 of this collection.

³ Drummond, 32.

⁴ *Ibid*, 43.

and, in 1927, witnessed the roots of the Shantung Revival, a time of Christian spiritual awakening for the Chinese of the Shantung Province. She returned home again for her furlough in 1931, but, as the Great Depression crippled the finances of United States citizens, the Foreign Mission Board could not afford to award her a stipend upon her return back to China in the 1930s.⁵

In 1937, Japan invaded China, and much of the work that Christians were able to do in the country was hampered. Bertha returned to the United States on furlough in 1939 and 1940, and when she went back to China, she was interned for six months by the Japanese, who, by this time, were also entangled in the Second World War.⁶ In a 1976 letter to Mr. and Mrs. James Huggins, she recounts how she sent half of her mission salary back to her mother and sister to help support them financially from 1939 to 1942. “Other missionaries marveled that I was able to get along on thirty-two dollars per month,” she wrote.⁷

Smith returned to the United States, from 1942 to 1948, and returned briefly to China, a country now torn between the communist regime of Mao Zedong and the nationalist regime of Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang Kai-shek’s government was soon expelled to Formosa (now called Taiwan), an island located off the southeastern coast of mainland China. In October, 1948, Bertha Smith became the first Foreign Mission Board-appointed missionary to Taiwan, a post at which she remained for a decade until her retirement from the FMB at age seventy.

After her retirement, Smith spent the 1960s traveling across the world spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ and telling about her mission experiences in China and Taiwan. She visited Australia, Burma, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Korea, Lebanon, Nigeria, the Philippines, South America, and Zimbabwe. She also accepted numerous speaking invitations from churches and organizations across the United States. She authored several books, including *Go Home and Tell* and *How the Spirit Filled My Life*, both which describe her experiences in the mission field of Asia. In 1971, Smith began work on the establishment of the Peniel Prayer Center in Cowpens, South Carolina. Peniel was dedicated October 28, 1973, and offered prayer retreats to Christians across the country several times each year. Peniel continued in operation for several years after Smith’s death.

Olive Bertha Smith was one of Southern Baptists’ most influential foreign missionaries. She was also a beloved educator, author, and administrator. Her devoted life of mission service and education prompted Luther Rice Seminary, in Lithonia, Georgia, to honor her by dedicating their Bertha Smith Library in 1982. On November 14, 1987, Hannibal-LaGrange College in Missouri established the Bertha Smith Chair for Spiritual Development. Bertha Smith died June 12, 1988, at age ninety-nine, just short of her 100th birthday.

Scope and Content Note

The Olive Bertha Smith Collection consists of seven linear feet of material – 433 folders and 186 audio cassette tapes contained in seven record boxes – which document Bertha Smith’s career as

⁵ Ibid, 70-71.

⁶ Ibid, 135-136.

⁷ Letter from Bertha Smith to Mr. and Mrs. James Huggins. September 30, 1976. Located in box 3, folder 27 of this collection.

a Southern Baptist foreign missionary, to China and Taiwan, and as the founder and director of the Peniel Prayer Center near her home of Cowpens, South Carolina. The collection, which contains an array of materials on Smith's tenure in China and Taiwan, includes Bible lessons, Bible notes, and her personal journal entries, both in Asia and in the United States, will be useful to researchers of SBC twentieth-century foreign missions and to researchers of religious prayer retreats in the United States. Smith's official missionary papers are located at the Southern Baptist Convention International Mission Board in Richmond, Virginia, but are not currently open for use.

In addition to material on Smith's missionary work in China and Taiwan, other significant aspects of the Olive Bertha Smith Collection include her Bible lessons, Bible notes, journal entries, manuscript publication notes, teaching materials, and an assortment of material detailing the administrative history of the Peniel Prayer Center. Her Bible lessons are in both written form and recorded on audio cassette. Smith made a number of Bible notes during her personal devotional times and as a student in the United States and China. The journal entries describe her activities as a foreign missionary, mission speaker, and prayer retreat director, while the manuscript notes and teaching material provide supplementary resources on books and material that she authored. The files on the Peniel Prayer Center include legal documents of the organization, correspondence, financial records, registration books, and trustee minutes and reports.

The correspondence section of the Olive Bertha Smith Collection contains letters, from 1917 to 1988, and includes a letter Smith wrote to former United States President, Jimmy Carter; several letters between Smith and Baker James Cauthen, Gerald Melton, and Milledge Theron Rankin; and a letter written to Smith from former SBC President Adrian Rogers. The collection also contains a significant number of letters between Smith and her sister, Jennie E. Smith (both in the correspondence section and in the file on Smith's retirement from missions in 1958), as well as their last wills and testaments.

The Olive Bertha Smith Collection contains nearly eighty posters of Chinese Bible lessons that are located in the map case of the archives. With the exception of the posters, the collection is arranged alphabetically.

The Spartanburg County Baptist Network in South Carolina donated the Olive Bertha Smith Collection to the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives in January 2004.

Arrangement

Files are arranged alphabetically

Provenance

Donated by the Spartanburg County Baptist Network in South Carolina to the SBHLA in January, 2004

Preferred Citation

Olive Bertha Smith Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee

Access Restrictions

No restrictions on the collection at the SBHLA. Smith's official missionary papers, located at the IMB in Richmond, Virginia, are not open for use

Subject Terms

Carter, Jimmy, 1924 –
 Cauthen, Baker James, 1909 – 1985
 Rankin, Milledge Theron, 1894 – 1953
 Rogers, Adrian, 1931 –
 Hannibal-LaGrange College
 Penial Prayer Center (Cowpens, South Carolina)
 China – religion
 Missions – China
 Missions – education and promotion
 Missions – Taiwan
 Missions, Foreign
 Shantung Revival

Related Materials

Smith, Bertha. *Go home and tell*. Nashville : Broadman Press, c1965.

Bertha Smith Papers, Southern Baptist Convention. International Mission Board. Missionary Correspondence Files, AR 551-2. Box 270.

Container List

Box 1

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- 1.2 *Baptist Courier* – 1953
- 1.3 *Baptist Courier* – 1976
- 1.4 Bible Commentaries
- 1.5 Bible Lessons – All Have Sinned
- 1.6 Bible Lessons – Backsliders
- 1.7 Bible Lessons – Be Ye Holy
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- 1.9 Bible Lessons – Call of God
- 1.10 Bible Lessons – Child
- 1.11 Bible Lessons – Christ Our Life
- 1.12 Bible Lessons – Christian in You
- 1.13 Bible Lessons – Churches
- 1.14 Bible Lessons – Darkness to Light
- 1.15 Bible Lessons – Deceptions of a Fulfilling Life
- 1.16 Bible Lessons – Dying to Self
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- 1.18 Bible Lessons – Faith in the Lord's Presence
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- 1.21 Bible Lessons – God and Christ’s Love
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- 1.40 Bible Lessons – Man’s State Before He Is Born Again
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- 1.43 Bible Lessons – Nicodemus
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- 1.45 Bible Lessons – Pointers for Soul Winners
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- 1.47 Bible Lessons – Second Coming, The
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- 1.49 Bible Lessons – Seven Basic Stages of Life
- 1.50 Bible Lessons – Sinful Man
- 1.51 Bible Lessons – Sins of Omission
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Box 7

Case 1

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Case 2

- Bible Lessons – Man’s Sinful Nature
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- Bible Lessons – Naaman the Leper
- Bible Lessons – Nicodemus
- Bible Lessons – Our Prayer Helper
- Bible Lessons – Priest/ Bride of Christ
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- Bible Lessons – Revelation 7:1-9:12
- Bible Lessons – Revelation 15:2
- Bible Lessons – Righteousness of God
- Bible Lessons – Salvation
- Bible Lessons – Sinfulness of Man and the Holiness of God (Tape 1 of 2)

Case 3

- Bible Lessons – Sinfulness of Man and the Holiness of God (Tape 2 of 2)
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- Bible Lessons – Spiritual Strongholds

Bible Lessons – Tabernacle
 Bible Lessons – Victor and the Victory
 Bible Lessons – Wall of Sin / Word a Mirror
 Bible Lessons – Woman at the Wall

Case 4

Peniel Prayer Center Retreats – (Tape 1)
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Case 5

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Case 6

Peniel Prayer Center Retreats, April 20 – 23, 1978 (Tape 1)
 Peniel Prayer Center Retreats, April 20 – 23, 1978 (Tape 2)
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 Peniel Prayer Center Retreats, April 20 – 23, 1978 (Tape 4)
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Case 7

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Case 8

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Case 9

Peniel Prayer Center Retreats, November 22 – 24, 1979 (Tape 9)
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Case 10

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Peniel Prayer Center Retreats, November 27 – 29, 1980 (Tape 9)
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Case 11

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 Peniel Prayer Center Retreats, May 21 – 23, 1981 (Tape 9)
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Case 12

Peniel Prayer Center Retreats, June 18 – 20, 1981 (Tape 2)
 Peniel Prayer Center Retreats, June 18 – 20, 1981 (Tape 3)
 Peniel Prayer Center Retreats, June 18 – 20, 1981 (Tape 4)
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Case 13

Peniel Prayer Center Retreats, September 20 – 22, 1984 (Tape 4)
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Case 14

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Case 15

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 Testimony – Bertha Smith

Case 16

Visiting Ministers – Joe Carroll
 Visiting Ministers – Ron Dunn, November 3, 1985
 Visiting Ministers – Ron Dunn, November 3, 1985
 Visiting Ministers – Ron Dunn, November 3, 1985
 Visiting Ministers – Ron Dunn, November 3, 1985
 Visiting Ministers – Ron Dunn, November 3, 1985
 Visiting Ministers – Sammy Holland
 Visiting Ministers – Kenneth Ridings

Case 17

Visiting Ministers – James Robinson
Visiting Ministers – Jack R. Taylor, September 27, 1977
Visiting Ministers – Len Turner

Map Case – Chinese Bible Lesson Posters (78 items)

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