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**The Events Surrounding and Repercussions Stemming
from the "Organ Incident" at Thorp Spring, Texas**



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A Term paper

Presented to Dr. Earl West

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As a Requirement in
Course 564 B
History of the Restoration Movement
1860 to 1910

by
Kevin Griffith**
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With the exception of a few interested residents of Hood County, and a few informed parties at Texas Christian University, the infamous phrase "Play On, Miss Bertha!" has faded into relative obscurity. It was uttered by Addison Clark Tuesday, February 20, 1894, on a cold and tension-filled evening that set in motion a chain of events that contributed to the demise of Add-Ran Christian University at Thorp Spring, Texas. At the same time the uttering of this sentence became the catalyst that ultimately led to the establishment of Texas Christian University at Ft. Worth, Texas, and establishment of Thorp Spring Christian College, both, ironically, in the year of 1910. Furthermore, this seemingly innocent little phrase also launched one of the unfortunate battles of words and actions from within the ranks of the Disciples of Christ. This is the story of Add-Ran Christian University and the three men, Joseph, Addison and Randolph Clark, who established, molded and shaped the character of the institution.

Beginnings at Ft. Worth

Our story begins in 1869 in Ft. Worth, Texas. While visiting this small village to seek a better location for his family, Joseph Clark made the acquaintance of Colonel John Peter Smith. Colonel Smith, who was conducting a school at this time, was seeking his replacement as headmaster. Joseph recommended his son Addison Clark. Smith offered and Addison accepted, and immediately following his wedding he and his new bride along with Randolph moved to Ft. Worth.^[1] Addison, his brother Randolph, and his father Joseph had all agreed that Ft. Worth, then a sleepy little village on a bluff overlooking the Clear Fork of the Trinity River, would be the town in which they all would settle long term. This location would allow for the education of their younger siblings. It would allow for Addison and Randolph to pursue their careers. (Randolph took charge of a school in Birdville, just northwest of Ft. Worth.) But most importantly it would allow the Clark family clan to remain together.^[2]

So intent on making a permanent settlement here Joseph and Addison both bought property on which to build their homes.^[3] However, upon learning that Addison was affiliated with the "Campbellites" the locals forced his school to move from the lower story of the Masonic lodge.^[4] A concrete building that had once been a church was procured for the next term and became a makeshift schoolhouse until better accommodations could be arranged.^[5] Soon afterward, Joseph and Addison obtained a plot of land on which to build a school. Yet shortly after the structure was built the railroad came to Ft. Worth. Overnight, the tiny village of hundreds was transformed into a thriving frontier community of

thousands. The area around the school underwent an undesirable transformation as well, and became known as “Hell’s Half Acre” because of the saloons, gambling halls and bordellos located in close proximity of one another and next to the new school.^[6] As Randolph so eloquently describes it in his *Reminiscences*,

“The town boys, the boys from the farms and ranches, rough, but clean, were dazzled by this glitter of vice and caught like insects around a street lamp.” ^[7]

This turn of events greatly disturbed the Clarks. It was agreed that a more suitable place would have to be found for the school.^[8]

The Move to Thorp Spring

In the summer of 1873 Addison was away from town preaching at various congregations attempting to raise awareness of and solicit students for the academy he had established in Ft. Worth.^[9] A representative of Mr. Pleasant Thorp arrived with an offer that proved tempting to Joseph and Randolph. Randolph immediately embarked upon a trip to Thorp’s Spring (later shortened to Thorp Spring), a tiny little community some forty miles southwest of Ft. Worth, to meet with Mr. Thorp and view a “college” building he had erected.^[10] Randolph was impressed with the land and the building he saw and made arrangements with “Old Man” Thorp to purchase his “commodious” school building for the sum of \$9,000, the same amount it cost Mr. Thorp to build. This arrangement, of course, was subject to the approval of Addison.^[11]

Joseph was easily sold on the idea of moving the school to this remote resort community on the banks of the Brazos River. Addison, however, was a bit

more reticent to accept this arrangement. Having just returned from a campaigning trip in which he had solicited students for his academy in Ft. Worth, he felt obligated to open the school for the fall term as he had advertised. So an agreement was reached. Randolph would open the school at Thorp Spring while Addison, with the assistance of his father, would honor his commitment in Ft. Worth.^[12] In the fall of 1873 Randolph opened the school with just thirteen students. However, before the end of the term the enrollment had reached seventy-five.^[13]

Randolph Clark was the first to use the name "Add-Ran College." In a letter to his brother Randolph closed by signing "R. Clark of Add-Ran College."^[14] Addison was touched by his brother's kind gesture. Addison's first child, a boy he named Add-Ran (pronounced AdRan)^[15] had died the previous winter at the age of three after contracting diphtheria.^[16] Addison replied "I accept the suggestion and enter heartily into the plans."^[17] He felt the name would be an inspiration to him and others. Thus the school was christened Add-Ran Male and Female College.^[18] Then, after the close of the 1873-74 school session in Ft. Worth, Addison moved his family to Thorp Spring and took on the mantle of the school president.^[19]

In 1873, a financial panic swept the nation and the boomtown of Ft. Worth quickly became a bust. Property values plummeted. The Clarks, who were relying on the sale of their properties to provide capital for their fledgling school, were suddenly faced with the possibility of financial ruin. Mr. Thorp's advisor, acting without Mr. Thorp's consent, assured Randolph that all accounts would be settled

at a later date, after the panic was over.^[20] However, in 1877, Mr. Thorp proved to be impatient with this arrangement and demanded the return of his building. Faced with closing the doors of the school, Joseph was able to convince Mr. Thorp to cancel their debt and allow the school to pay rent on his building until the close of the school session. Arrangements would then be made to acquire new facilities for the 1877-78 session. Thorp agreed to this arrangement.^[21] Randolph, who was attending Bethany College at this time, was abruptly summoned home to help the family in their relocation efforts.^[22]

At great sacrifice the Clarks were able to sell their Ft. Worth properties plus other family assets in Collin County and in Bonham, Texas, to raise enough funds to purchase six and one half acres adjacent to "Old Man" Thorp's property.^[23] Temporary buildings were erected for the 1877-78 session and the school was able to continue while newer and more appropriate buildings were constructed under the supervision of Joseph Clark.^[24] What capital they lacked from the sale of their personal properties they made up by selling scholarships covering tuition and board. This proved later to be an ill-advised undertaking.^[25] Yet their sacrifices were rewarded with the steady rise in the enrollment.

The Transfer to the Texas State Convention

The Clarks were once again facing ominous financial struggles. In 1889, in order to rectify the situation, Addison and Randolph approached the State Convention of the Christian Churches and asked them to take control of the oversight and financial obligations of the school. The Convention assumed the

school's \$5,000 debt in exchange for the deed to 640 acres of land in West Texas, the deed to 160 acres in Kaufman County, and the deed to the buildings and property of the Thorp Spring complex which was valued at \$43,000.^[26] An additional payment of \$2,000 was made to Joseph so he would join in the deal.^[27]

The agreement was made and in 1890 the society officially took control of the school. The convention immediately appointed a new board of trustees with Mr. J. J. Jarvis as the president.^[28] Jarvis always had a great admiration for the Clarks, but felt they were "babes" in finance.^[29] Nevertheless "Marvelous" Jarvis proved to be a great benefactor to the school, donating thousands to its cause.^[30]

The board's first action was to change the name of the school to Add-Ran Christian University.^[31] Addison had purposefully avoided using "Christian" in the title for he did not wish to "denominationalize" the name.^[32] He also believed the school was not worthy of the title "University." But these matters were no longer left up to him, although the board did continue with him as the President of the newly chartered institution.^[33] But Addison felt if the school was to continue, then it would need an endowment, and the Convention took on the responsibility of raising the endowment funds.^[34]

At first, the transfer had little affect on the College. The Clarks had striven to make the school "Christian in spirit." There was little alteration with the internal affairs, with the curriculum and with its moral tone.^[35] However, these matters would change after a short time.^[36] The school soon became a "clearing house" for the "progressive notions" of the convention.^[37]

Trouble on the Horizon

On Sunday evening October 8, 1893, Sallie Clark wrote a letter to her son Addison Clark Jr., who was a student at the University of Michigan. In this letter she spoke of her failing health, of the warm weather at Thorp Spring and of Randolph's sermon that morning. She mentioned that Dr. James Headly was to lecture at the school and pondered who might entertain him. Then she followed with the phrase "Oh, I do feel so bad over this trouble."^[38] Mr. James Feagin, a student at Add-Ran at this time, claims Mrs. Clark was referring to the "organ trouble" that had the church and community of Thorp Spring all "a stir."^[39] An article, written by Joseph Clark, that appeared in the October 26, 1893 issue, of the *Gospel Advocate* confirms Mr. Feagin's claim. In this article Joseph expressed disappointment over the progressive tendencies he sees in the brotherhood. He compared how people resolved controversies *then* as opposed to *now*. He lamented over the introduction of societies, the pastor system, and especially the organ. Joseph's views on how to solve each of these controversial matters can be ascertained in the following quote:

"In all our work and worship *then* we were governed by the Bible. If in anything we could not agree, we would refer to the Bible to settle the question. If the Bible said nothing about it, the thing was settled.... *Now*, if there be a matter upon which we cannot agree, 'sanctified common sense' settles the question by a majority vote."^[40]

A storm was brewing at Add-Ran, and Joseph was at the center of it.

The "Organ Incident"

According to Mrs. Bertha (Mason) Fuller, the organ was already in use for young people's meetings and sometimes in morning chapel. A compromise had been reached that allowed the students to use the organ for these events,^[41] but the organ had never been used for Sunday worship services.^[42] This, no doubt, was what had spurred Joseph on to write the article cited above.

As was the custom of the students at Add-Ran, an annual meeting was to be held at the college. The student religious organizations were responsible for the planning of the event, including the invitations that were to be extended to the visiting evangelists. This was commonly referred to as "Religious Emphasis Week."^[43] A Brother B. B. Sanders was approached and invited to conduct the meetings. Mr. Sanders was known to favor the use of the organ in his meetings.^[44] And, according to Mr. Feagan, this was what caused the entire town to be "all a stir."^[45]

In another letter, dated February 11, 1894, Sallie relates to her son that the Jacobs had "sold out and were moving to Cleburne." She expressed joy over the move for the Jacobs were on the side of the "Antis," the name that was given to the Anti-organ group. She also lamented that a new board had been elected at the church, all of which were on "that side." She listed Joseph Clark among these board members elected, and concluded, "The Antis want to run things and I fear there will be trouble."^[46]

The meeting began on Sunday, February 18th, with B. B. Sanders at the helm. Tuesday night, February 20, 1894, the event came to a climax. Addison had promised

the students that they would be able to use the organ during their meeting and he intended to keep his word. Sallie Clark relates in another letter to Addison, Jr., that on that Tuesday night the whole town had come out, "every chick and babe," to see what was about to unfold.^[47] One eyewitness estimated 565 people were present.^[48] It was rumored that the "Antis" had gotten up a petition to take the organ out. Many conflicting details have been preserved that relate what actually did happen next, but the gist of the story is essentially the same.

Before the meeting started the elder Joseph Clark rose and asked his son if he might say a prayer for unity. Addison relented and Joseph said a few words and led the prayer.^[49] But after the prayer he produced a petition with 139 signatures and attempted to read the document to the audience. Due to failing eyesight he was unable to read the petition thus he prevailed upon Ples Taylor to finish reading it. Addison and Randolph, as was their custom, conferred in front of the congregation in quiet whispers for a few minutes.^[50] Then Addison turned to his father and stated he had given the students his word that they could use the organ in their meeting and that he intended to keep his word. After this he turned, raised his right hand, pointed in the direction of the organist, Miss Bertha Mason, and said, "Play on, Miss Bertha!"^[51]

As the sound of the organ filled the building, Joseph Clark walked out "punctuating the rhythm of the music with his cane" and followed by a large crowd amid much "weeping and groans."^[52] Eyewitnesses vary on the exact number of the people that walked out. Those on the "Anti" side claimed a full two-thirds of the congregation left with Mr. Clark,^[53] and that the meeting was a complete failure.^[54]

Those in the Pro-organ camp claimed only about 140 walked out, that the meeting was a successful endeavor for the students, citing 11 baptisms as a result of the week's revival.^[55] But regardless of the number that walked out, or whether the meeting was a success or not, the school would never be the same.

Fallout from the Incident

Many of the objectors that left were furious over the incident. Sallie Clark, in a letter dated February 25, 1894, related to Addison, Jr., "I thought they would break all the windows they were so furious." She also related that someone had cut the rope to the school bell, someone had wired their gate and the college gate shut, and that someone had "thrown and broken a window light." She also stated that she was surprised their house had not been set aflame.^[56] C. W. Howard in a letter written to his sister described the furor outside the meeting hall:

"Add Hall and a bunch came to me on campus and wanted me to advice them to go and get the devilish machine [organ] and cut it up with an axe and throw it in the creek. I told them they could not afford it. It would ruin their cause. They withdrew."^[57]

He then quotes Randolph Clark's concern over the fallout that will result from the episode.

"The next day Randolph said to me: 'It will ruin us. These old brethren in the country will not let us in the school houses,' and it did."^[58]

On that day after the incident, Randolph Clark was able to circulate a second petition seeking a peaceful compromise. This was interpreted as some to mean

Randolph was on the side of the "Antis," but this was not the case. It was consistent with his nature to play the peacemaker.^[59] The second petition stated that the undersigned would return to the service if the organ were removed.^[60] Sanders agreed to the compromise and the organ was removed for the rest of the week, with Ples Taylor taking his regular turn in the pulpit on February 25th.^[61] However, many of the "Antis" did not return to the meeting. The following week Sanders proceeded the meeting with the use of the organ.^[62]

The Demise of Add-Ran Christian College

Colby Hall admits that the incident is an example of an emotional, explosive open break between Disciples of Christ (Pro-organ) and Churches of Christ (Anti-organ).^[63] Yet he seems to minimize the impact of the incident by attributing the demise of the school primarily to financial struggles and the financial panic of 1893-94. Hall himself claims that the majority of the students that did not return for the 1894-95 session following the "organ incident" were from around the Thorp Spring area, notably a more conservative segment of the "brotherhood."^[64] The school was now sitting in the midst of hostile territory.

In the 1892-93 session the school had reached an enrollment of 445 students, one of its highest totals. This slipped to 370 students in the 1893-94 session. Yet in the 1894-95 session the enrollment was only 270 students, the lowest total since 1877.^[65] If, as Mr. Hall claims, the enrollment was down due to the locals pulling their children out of the "progressive" institution, then it stands to reason that the financial burdens brought on by the drop in enrollment can be

attributed to the “organ incident,” rather than the financial panic of 1893-94.

Further evidence supporting the claim that the “organ incident” hastened the demise of Add-Ran can be obtained from another one of Joseph Clark’s articles written to the *Gospel Advocate* and published in the February 20, 1896 issue. Joseph wrote:

“A progressive organist, with his organ grinder, came to ‘test the religious character of the school,’ as they said. The school and the church had grown up together in their religious work and worship, all meeting for worship at the same time and same place. The effort to force the organ into the worship was signal failure. There was not one in six of the whole church that was in favor of it. But the President of the University determined he would run the thing anyhow on the high plane of fad and fancy, ignored the church, converted the school into a quasi church, and ran the school down and down until he squeezed the life out of it. ...they suddenly asserted that Thorp Spring was a miserably poor location for a college as one of them said, ‘It ought to be in Waco or some other progressive city of the state.’”^[66]

J. L. Clark contends that the organ incident had far-reaching effects throughout the state and beyond its borders. Clark concludes:

“Involving as it did, the Brotherhood’s school, whose patrons were scattered throughout the region, news of the affair spread rapidly to the churches, raising tensions, crystallizing personal opinions, and splitting congregations.”^[67]

Epilogue

What became of Add-Ran Christian College? In 1895, at the insistence of the board of trustees, it moved to Waco, Texas.^[68] Randolph remained in Thorp Spring. He served on the faculty of several “feeder” colleges that were affiliated with the larger school in Waco,^[69] including as President of a school named in his honor.^[70] Unfortunately, all of these enterprises failed. Randolph died in 1935 and was buried in Stephenville, Texas.

Joseph became somewhat of a hero to the conservatives living in Texas and especially around Thorp Spring. He remained true to his convictions^[71] and lived out the remainder of his days in Thorp Springs where he died "brokenhearted" in 1901.^[72] He is buried next to his wife Hetty in the Thorp Spring Cemetery.

With the desire to keep the Clark family together not the priority it had once been, Addison remained President and moved to Waco with the school. But due to differences in opinion over discipline and internal matters of the school, he resigned this post in 1901. In 1902 the school's name was changed to Texas Christian University.^[73] Addison pastored churches in Waco and Amarillo before his death in 1911.^[74] He lived out his last days at the home of one of his daughters in Comanche, Texas.

Although the school had moved to a more populated area it continued to experience enrollment struggles.^[75] Yet the school was able to survive. A disastrous fire burned the main plant in 1910. But, the citizens of Ft. Worth made an enticing offer of 56 acres and \$200,000. The board of trustees accepted the offer and Add-Ran, now Texas Christian University, moved to its present day location.^[76] The school had returned to its place of origin.

The old Add-Ran property underwent many changes of hands from 1895 through 1910. Many institutions were tried and all failed. Ironically in 1910, the same year that TCU was established in Ft. Worth, the churches of Christ bought the Add-Ran property and felt some vindication over having reclaimed the school.^[77] They quickly established Thorp Spring Christian College, a junior college that was to be based on the teaching of the "pure word of God."^[78] The

school thrived for a while, opening with an enrollment of 140. In 1917, Randolph Clark returned to make a rare appearance in the school's chapel service. He brought the students to their feet when he stated that Thorp Spring Christian College was "more nearly his ideal of a good school than any school within his acquaintance," and that he would "do all he could do to advance the interests of the school." ^[79] The flourishing of Abilene Christian College coupled with Thorp Spring's remote location caused enrollment to drop. Financial concerns prompted the school's move to Terrell, Texas in 1928. Many of the faculty were opposed to the move and refused to leave and the school was unable to recover. It closed its doors in 1930. ^[80]

For years the old Thorp Spring property was used as a Christian encampment. But one by one time claimed each of the old school buildings. Little evidence remains of the school now.

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End Notes

^[1] Jerome A. Moore, Texas Christian University, A Hundred Years of History, (Ft. Worth: TCU Press, 1974), 5.

^[2] Moore, 5.

^[3] Lou Ella C. Holloway, Add-Ran College, Add-Ran Christian University, and Texas Christian University, (Brownwood, Texas: 1944) , 4.

^[4] Randolph Clark, Reminiscences, Biographical and Historical, (Wichita Falls, Texas: Lee Clark Publisher, 1919), 35.

^[5] E. B. Bynum, These Carried the Torch, Pioneers of Christian Education in Texas, (Dallas: Walter F. Clark Company, 1946) , 17.

^[6] R. Clark, Reminiscences, 41.

^[7] Ibid.

^[8] R. Clark, Reminiscences, 41.

^[9] Ibid. , 42.

^[10] Ibid. , 42-43.

[11] R. Clark, Reminiscences, 43.

[12] Colby D. Hall, History of Texas Christian University, A College of the Cattle Frontier, (Ft. Worth: TCU Press, 1947), 34.

[13] Bynum, 18.

[14] Thomas Taylor Ewell, History of Hood County (Granbury, Texas: Frank Gibson, Publisher, 1895), accessed at <http://www.hcnews.com/depot/ginger/Ewell45.htm> on July 2, 2001. I was unable to obtain a copy of Ewell's book. It is out of print. However, a larger volume of Hood County History has been published by the Hood County Historical Society. This volume contains the original text of Mr. Ewell's book. I was able to access the chapters I needed for a short time via the Internet due to the kindness of Virginia Hale. Ms. Hale re-posted the chapters I needed for a limited time. At one time the entire text of Mr. Ewell's book was posted on the Internet. But at the urging of the Hood County Historical Society it was removed. Should you wish to obtain a copy of the new book it is available for \$24.95 from the Hood County Historical Society Gift shop located in downtown Granbury, Texas.

[15] Holloway, 1.

[16] R. Clark, Reminiscences, 37-38.

[17] Ewell, chapter XLVI.

[18] Hall, History, 36.

[19] Bynum, p. 18.

[20] R. Clark, Reminiscences, 48-49.

[21] Ibid., 51-52.

[22] Moore, 18.

[23] Holloway, 8.

[24] R. Clark, Reminiscences, 53.

[25] Hall, History, 41-42.

[26] Holloway, 13-14.

[27] R. Clark, Reminiscences, 58.

[28] Colby D. Hall, Texas Disciples (Ft. Worth, TCU Press, 1953), 268.

[29] Hall, History, 50.

[30] Moore, 26-27.

[31] Bynum, 21.

[32] Boren, 226.

[33] Stephen D. Eckstein, History of Churches of Christ in Texas, (Austin: Firm Foundation, 1963),

213.

[34] Carter E. Boren, Religion on the Texas Frontier, (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1968), 231.

[35] J. L. Clark, Thank God We Made It! A Family Affair with Education, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 431.

[36] *Ibid.*, 229-230.

[37] C. A. Norred, "When the Organ Came to Thorp Springs," *Firm Foundation* 57 (December 3, 1940) :3.

[38] Sallie Clark to Addison Clark, Jr., 3 October 1893, in the Joseph Lynn Clark Papers, Special Collections, Mary Burnett Couts Library, Texas Christian University, Ft. Worth.

[39] James Feagin, to Joseph Lynn Clark, 15 January 1958, transcript in the Joseph Lynn Clark Papers, Special Collections, Mary Burnett Couts Library, Texas Christian University, Ft. Worth.

[40] Joseph Clark, "Then and Now," Gospel Advocate 35 (October 26, 1893): 687.

[41] J. L. Clark, Thank God We Made It!, 433.

[42] Colby D. Hall, Texas Disciples, 147-148.

[43] J. L. Clark, Thank God We Made It!, 432-433.

[44] *Ibid.* , 434.

[45] Sallie Clark, to Addison Clark, Jr., 11 February 1894, transcript in the Joseph Lynn Clark Papers, Special Collections, Mary Burnett Couts Library, Texas Christian University, Ft. Worth.

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] Mrs. Frank Miller Mason, "The Beginnings of TCU," (Masters thesis, Texas Christian University, 1930), 111.

[48] J. L. Clark, Thank God We Made It!, 435.

[49] P. T. Taylor, "The B. B. Sanders Meeting," *Firm Foundation*. 10 (April 10, 1894): 8.

[50] J. L. Clark, Thank God We Made It!, 435.

[51] *Ibid.*, 435.

[52] *Ibid.*, 435-436.

[53] Taylor, 8.

[54] Norred, 3.

[55] J. L. Clark, Thank God We Made It!, 436.

[56] Sallie Clark, to Addison Clark, Jr., 25 February 1894, transcript in the Joseph Lynn Clark Papers,

Special Collections, Mary Burnett Coutts Library, Texas Christian University, Ft. Worth.

[57] Mason, 112.

[58] Ibid.

[59] J. I. Clark, Thank God We Made It!, 437-438.

[60] J. E. Carnes, "The Organ," *Gospel Advocate* 36 (March 8, 1894): 152.

[61] Taylor, 8.

[62] J. L. Clark, Thank God We Made It!, 438.

[63] Hall, History, 78. At this time both groups met as one. The two groups officially split in 1906.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Joseph Clark, "Add-Ran College," *Gospel Advocate* 38 (February 20, 1896): 124.

[67] J. L. Clark, Thank God We Made It!, 439.

[68] Holloway, 15.

[69] Hall, History, 79.

[70] Ibid. , 321-330.

[71] Don H. Morris, "Add-Ran and Its Heirs," *Restoration Quarterly*, 6 (Fall/ Winter 1973): 268.

[72] T. H. Dabney, E. M. Dabney, J. P. Sewell, "Greatest Opportunity Presented to Churches of Christ in Texas," *Firm Foundation*, 26 (January 11, 1910): 6.

[73] Bynum, 22.

[74] R. Clark, Reminiscences, 68-74.

[75] Boren, 236.

[76] Holloway, 15.


[77] Hall, History, 78.


[78] Jesse P. Sewell, "A Great Meeting at Thorp Springs," *The Christian Leader and the Way* (March 15, 1910): 8.


[79] Carl A. Gardner, "Randolph Clark Visits Thorp Spring," *Firm Foundation* (June 5, 1917): 6.

[80] M. Norvell Young, A History of Colleges Established and Controlled by Members of the Churches of Christ (Kansas City: Old Paths Book Club, 1949), 80-81.

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