

THE HONORABLE WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

"In The Beginning" 1918-1925

Time: December 1st, 1918.

Place: The First Presbyterian Church of Miami, Florida.

Occasion: Judge Penny's Adult Bible Class without a Teacher.

Present: America's most prominent layman and Christian Statesman, The Honorable William Jennings Bryan who, having recently resigned as Secretary of State, had moved from Washington to Miami.

This combination of events prompted the superintendent of the Presbyterian Sunday School, Clifton D. Benson, to invite Mr. Bryan to teach this group of men and women, which, under Mr. Bryan's leadership, soon became the most popular Bible Class in America.

The sound of Mr. Bryan's resonant voice caused the "passers-by" on Flagler Street to pause and listen. At first they crowded about the windows and doors; and then they filled the auditorium. After the third session, the church could no longer hold the crowds that eagerly sought to hear "The Great Commoner."

Across the street from the church was a baseball park with bleacher stands, and thither Mr. Bryan led his followers,—thus establishing what was possibly the first Open-Air Bible Class of any prominence since the days of the Early Church.

Shortly thereafter, the city erected on this property a band-stand with chairs and benches for a series of band concerts. And it was here that Mr. Bryan taught thousands of tourists and Miami residents each Sunday until his death in 1925.

Mr. William S. Witham, an Atlanta banker and Miami winter resident, was president of the Class during these years; and Mr. J. B. Lansdell led the singing, accompanied by a small folding-organ.

In their autobiography Mrs. Bryan writes, "There is a distinct charm about these meetings beneath the open sky, under the shade of graceful palms, and on the shore of beautiful Biscayne Bay. And I have seen shabby men standing behind trees and bushes, whose interest so grew under Mr. Bryan's words that they boldly marched up the aisle and found seats. And our little grandson, aged four, remarked, "I like to attend grandpa's class because God can see us here."

The above information has been furnished by Mr. Bryan's daughter, Grace Dexter Bryan and Mr. Clifton D. Benson, Superintendent of the Sunday School of the First Presbyterian Church in 1918



DR. EVERETT S. SMITH
1926 - 1935

THE OLYMPIA BIBLE CLASS

Shortly after Mr. Bryan's death in 1925, Dr. Everett S. Smith, pastor of the First Christian Church, re-organized the class in the Olympia Theatre under the name "Olympia Men's Bible Class." Here for nearly nine years Dr. Smith taught the International Sunday School Lessons to capacity audiences,—as nearly every Sunday the "Standing Room Only" sign appeared at the entrance of the theatre. Mr. Frank Strubbe became the first president of the Olympia Class and Mr. Arthur H. Bosworth the secretary.

Attendance on the first Sunday was 397; but so rapidly did this class increase in size that the average attendance throughout this entire period was 1865. For two years this class conducted a membership contest,—the first year with California's largest Bible Class at Long Beach, and the second year with the large Bible Class in Kansas City. The Olympia Bible Class won the honors on each occasion,—the attendance on special days being as high as 7550. Thus on many occasions it became necessary to divide the class,—one section meeting in the theatre, and the other in Bayfront Park.

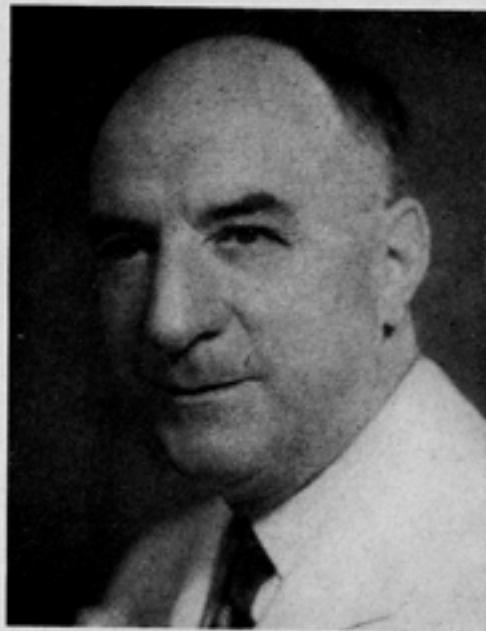
Under Dr. Smith's inspired leadership the class rendered many humanitarian services; among these being the organization of "The Three Score and Ten Club;" and "the Lighthouse for the Blind." Both of these organizations have prospered through the years and each now has its own residence property. The class also sent the first plane with food and medicine to the distressed Bahamas Cays after the 1928 hurricane.

During these years the class also had a very large Radio Membership, including over 8,000 in nearby Cuba, with listeners in every Province. The Olympia Class remained in session throughout the year, and thus attracted many people who would not attend regular church services.

The Class paper, "The Handclasp," edited by Stephen C. Singleton began with four pages, but was soon expanded to a sixteen page bulletin. The Honorary Membership of the Olympia Class included such notables as Cyrus H. Curtis, publisher of the Saturday Evening Post, Governor Meyers Y. Cooper of Ohio and Charles F. Kettering.

In 1935, after nearly nine years of devoted, noteworthy leadership, Dr. Smith was obliged to resign because of failing health.

*The above information has been furnished by Mr. Arthur H. Bosworth,
Secretary of the Olympia Men's Bible Class.*



GEORGE C. WILLIAMS

1935 - 1949.

In 1935 the Class re-assembled in Bayfront Park, only a short distance from where Mr. Bryan held the Class. For several weeks the Class was taught by Dr. William T. Ellis, journalist and editor of the popular syndicated articles on the International Sunday School Lessons.

Then George C. Williams, former president of Ithaca College of Ithaca, N. Y., accepted the class leadership and has continued as its teacher to the present date. Mr. Williams' extensive travels throughout the Near East, together with his experience as a teacher and lecturer eminently fitted him for this work. As he had now retired from his duties at Ithaca College, Mr. Williams was able to devote his entire time to this Class, which is now reputed to be the largest Bible Class in America.

In 1943 the Class was incorporated under the laws of the State of Florida and placed under the control of a Board of twenty-five Directors. Eight of these directors are elected by the active members of the class; eight by the class sponsors; and eight are appointed by the Board of Directors. The president of the Greater Miami Ministerial Association automatically becomes the 25th director.

At the request of the Greater Miami Ministerial Association, Mr. Williams addresses the Class each Sunday on the central theme of the International Sunday School Lesson for the following Sunday. These Lesson-Talks are printed and distributed through the mails without charge to Sunday School Teachers, as an aid in preparing the lesson.

Opportunity for questions or for consultation is provided by the class teacher either at the close of the session or at any time during the week. The class program is usually broadcast over one of the the Miami Radio Stations.

As the class is largely for the benefit of Miami's tourist visitors, its sessions include only about twenty weeks each year,—extending from the first Sunday in December through Easter Sunday.



MR. BRYAN AND HIS CLASS

MEMBERSHIP

The class program always bears the following invitation,—“This class is devoted to men and women of all ages, races, denominations and creeds, who sincerely desire a better way of life and, to that end, seek divine help and guidance.”

From the moment that this class began to hold its sessions in “God’s Great Out-of-Doors”, its welcome became as broad as the open spaces in which it meets. “Whosoever Will May Come!”—church-members and non-church-members, believers and non-believers, the interested and the indifferent, those of all denominations and sects. And the breadth of this appeal has increased through the years.

Depending largely on the season of the year, the attendance ranges from a few hundred to over five thousand. It has been estimated that about 65% of those in attendance are Sunday School teachers, church members or religious workers; 25% were formerly active members, but have drifted away from the church; 5% are skeptics, atheists and “the utterly indifferent; and 5% are park loafers without any interest in moral or spiritual matters,—or in life itself.

Protestants of all denominations, Catholics and Jews will be found among those in attendance. The class in every way encourages this spirit of universal brotherhood. Protestants, Catholics and Jews are always to be found among the financial sponsors of the class, and usually among the members of the official governing Board of Directors.

Where else will be found a similar group of worshippers of all faiths and beliefs, communing together in perfect harmony, encouraging and exemplifying the spirit of Universal Brotherhood?



THE OLYMPIA BIBLE CLASS

GUEST SPEAKERS

Our Guest Speakers include the most prominent religious leaders of our time. Among those who have addressed the class during recent years are the Honorary Members listed on Pages 12 and 13; also the following:

- Gerard Priestly of London, England. February 1, 1942.
- D. Leigh Colvin, Prohibition Nominee for President of U.S. Feb. 22, 1942.
- Dr. Herbert L. Willett, Associate Editor of Christian Century. Feb. 8, 1942.
- Rear Admiral J. L. Kaufman. December 20, 1942.
- Father James A. Greeley, Augusta, Ga. February 14, 1943.
- Joe Mitchell Chapple, Editor and Lecturer. March 14, 1943 and March 27, 1949.
- Dr. D. Brewer Eddy, Sec. American Board of Foreign Missions, Feb. 6, 1944.
- Robert G. Letourneau, Pres. International Christian Business Men's Committee. February 18, 1940.
- Dr. H. Framer Smith, Pres. Bible Institute of Penna. March 1, 1942.
- Dr. John S. Badeau, Dean American University in Cairo, Egypt. Jan. 25, 1942.
- John E. Klingberg, Founder Klingberg Children's Home, February 13, 1944.

BIBLE PRESENTATION

Through the generosity of Mr. W. L. Philbrick, a former president of this class, a beautiful Teacher's Bible is presented each week to some person attending the class. The method of presentation varies from week to week. The Bible may go to the person residing the greatest distance from Miami; or to one who attended the class in Mr. Bryan's time; or to the one with the most perfect attendance for the past five years or to the one who has brought the greatest number of friends to the class on that day.



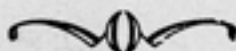
The Lesson-Talk in the Home

THE LESSON-TALKS

At the request of the Greater Miami Ministerial Association, the text of the International Sunday School Lesson for the following Sunday becomes the theme of each address before the class. These Lesson-Talks are mimeographed some weeks in advance and are forwarded free to all Sunday School teachers requesting the same. Among the tourists attending the class each Sunday are many Sunday School teachers who request this service. As a result, these Lesson-Talks are being sent to interested persons in nearly every state in the country. The class has now extended this service to "shut-ins" and, upon request, to any interested person anywhere.

No attempt is made in these Lesson-Talks to present an analytical study of the text. Selecting the central thought of the lesson, the speaker endeavors to apply the same, with appropriate illustrations, to the immediate practical problems of life. At all times, the aim and purpose is to furnish an impulse and an inspiration to a Better Way of Life.

Through the years, the free distribution of these Lesson-Talks has developed into one of the best forms of service offered by this class.





THE WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN BIBLE CLASS

Meets in Bayfront Park, Miami, Florida, each Sunday Afternoon at 4:30 o'clock, from the first Sunday in December through Easter Sunday.



A Group of Eager Listeners

The following brief excerpts from letters recently received will give some idea as to the scope and nature of this service.

FROM SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS

From the North:

"These Lesson-Talks have brought a great deal of comfort to many people." Mrs. Leroy Hamlin, Bethel, Maine.

From the South:

"To say that we receive help and inspiration from the Lesson-Talks is expressing it mildly." Prof. B. H. Hayes, South Miami, Florida.

From the East:

"Inspiring, encouraging and most opportune."
T. Augustus Toote, Nassau, Bahamas.

From the West:

"Not only eloquent, but heartening and helpful."
Frank W. Collins, San Marino, California.

FROM PASTORS

"I think they are among the best."—Dr. Clay Shaffer, Altoona, Penna.

"They have furnished me many hours of enjoyment."—Dr. J. Richard Sneed, Rockford, Ill.

FROM "SHUT-INS"

"No sermon over the radio can take the place of your Lesson-Talks"
Mrs. Lulu G. Baerke, Miami, Florida.

"The Lesson-Talks have been most helpful and inspiring."—Mrs. Nannie Brown, Greenville, S. C.

FROM Y.M.C.A. SECRETARY

"Beautiful and soul-stirring * * Magnificent in its world outlook and courageous facing of unpleasant facts."—George F. Robinson, Daytona Beach, Florida.

FROM SALVATION ARMY

"I receive a great deal of good out of these Lesson-Talks for my own sermons."—Adjutant Richard T. Bergren, Miami, Florida.

OUR HONORARY MEMBERS



DR. ROBERT ELLIOTT SPEER

was one of the world's greatest Christian Laymen. For nearly fifty years Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

Addressed this class on March 8, 1942.



SIR WILFRED THOMAS GREENFELL

was Medical Missionary to Labrador for nearly fifty years, where he built 5 Hospitals, 7 Nursing Stations, 2 Orphanages, 2 Large Schools, Co-operative Stores, etc.

Addressed this Class February 19 and March 26, 1939.



DR. JOHN TIMOTHY STONE

Moderator of General Assembly of Presbyterian Church U.S.A. 1913-14. President of Presbyterian Theological Seminary 1928-40.

Addressed this class January 26 and February 2, 1941.



RABBI SOLOMON GOLDMAN

President National Hebrew Association 1937. Trustee Jewish Theological Seminary of America. President Zionist Organization of America, 1938.

Addressed this class February 14, 1943.



DR. FRANCIS S. HUTCHINS

President of Berea College since 1939.

Addressed this class February 25, 1940.



OUR HONORARY MEMBERS

RUTH BRYAN RHODE

Daughter of the Founder of this Class.
Member of the 71st and 72nd Congress.
Minister to Denmark 1933-36.



GRACE BRYAN HARGRAVES

Daughter of the Founder of this Class
Addressed this Class December 12, 1937 and March
20, 1938.



DR. EVERETT S. SMITH

Teacher of this Class from 1926 to 1935.



DR. GEORGE W. TRUETT

was President of Southern Baptist Convention.
President of Baptist World Alliance 1934.
Addressed this Class January 18, 1942.



DR. SAM HIGGINBOTTOM

Missionary to India for 41 years.
Moderator of Presbyterian Church in U.S.A. 1939.
Decorated with Gold Medal by Indian Government,
1924 and 1943.
King George Jubilee Medal, 1935.
Coronation Medal, 1937.
Addressed this class March 13, 1949.



MIAMI SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL CHORUS

The first thirty minutes of each class session is devoted to a program of sacred music; and many of the foremost soloists and musical organizations in the South have appeared on these programs. Among these are:

Orpheus Male Chorus
Miami Senior High School Chorus
Dade County Singers
University of Tampa Band
Mahi Shrine Band
Miami Edison Senior High School Chorus
Southern Naval District (Yorktown) Band
Choir of the Coral Gables Presbyterian Church
Choir of the First Christian Church
Andrew Jackson High School Chorus
Caesar LaMonica Concert Band
Choir of the Trinity Methodist Church
Homestead High School Band
Greater Miami Boys Drum and Bugle Corps
Ponce de Leon High School Chorus

MUSICAL DIRECTORS OF THE BIBLE CLASS

1918 - 1925 J. B. Lansdell
1926 - 1931 Kash Strothers
1932 - 1935 Adolph Seerth
1936 Dr. Clarence Carter Nice
1937 Adolph Seerth
1938 Lester C. Kicklighter
1939 H. Carleton Slack
1940 - 1949 Adolph Seerth



THE PROGRAM IN ACTION

A CONDENSED SAMPLE PROGRAM

ORDER OF SERVICE

February 27, 1949

4:30 to 5:30 P. M.

J. N. McARTHUR, Class President, Presiding

Piano Prelude

Singing of America

Invocation

Hymn: "Holy, Holy, Holy!"

Chorus: "Battle Hymn of the Republic".....Wilhouski
 "Lost in the Night".....Christianson
 Miami Edison Senior High School Glee Club.
 under the Direction of Mrs. Frances Deen

Announcements

Offertory

Hymn: "Stand Up for Jesus".....George J. Webb

Responsive Reading: (Being a condensed version of the text for the International Sunday School Lesson.)

Solo: "O Holy Hour".....Nevin
 Lee Nelson

Chorus: "One World".....O'Hara
 Miami Edison Senior High School Glee Club

Address: "Choose You This Day"
 George C. Williams

Benediction by Dr. Frank E. Harlow.

BLEST BE THE TIE

Bible Presentation

Song Leader: Adolph Seerth

Pianist: Warner Hardman

The Ushers, under the direction of Ray Brogley and T. G. Nesbit are the Boy Scouts from the Miami Shores Presbyterian Church.



J. N. McARTHUR

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS
1948 - 1949

- J. N. McArthur, President
 McGregor Smith, Vice-President
 Albert R. Klemer, Secretary
 John B. Keena, Treasurer
 George C. Williams, Teacher and Director
 1639 South Bayshore Drive—Phone 48-1296
 Miami 33, Florida

DIRECTORS

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Alexander Berne | W. L. Philbrick |
| David L. Bosworth | Fleming G. Railey |
| Kermyt W. Callahan | Rev. George H. Ricks |
| Leslie D. Cann | Edward Rorem |
| Mrs. L. C. Cook | Adolph Seerth |
| Dr. Frank E. Harlow | C. Wilfred Smith |
| Charles S. Leyden | A. M. Tyler |
| Mrs. J. D. McKenney | William Urmev |
| W. J. Meisenheimer | Dr. Russell A. Williams |
| Judge Stanley Milledge | Mitchell Wolfson |
| Alexander Orr | |

PAST PRESIDENTS

- | | |
|-------------|---------------------------|
| 1918 - 1925 | William S. Witham |
| 1925 - 1930 | Frank Strubbe |
| 1931 | Frank E. Bryant |
| 1932 - 1935 | George M. Thompson |
| 1936 - | Alexander Orr |
| 1937 - 1939 | Dr. Russell A. Williams |
| 1940 | Judge W. Raleigh Petteway |
| 1941 - 1942 | Bryan Hanks |
| 1943 - 1944 | W. L. Philbrick |
| 1945 - 1946 | Judge Henry Oppenborn |
| 1947 - 1948 | Fleming G. Railey |
| 1949 | J. N. McArthur |



JOHN B. KEENA
Treasurer of the Class

THE CLASS SPONSORS

The Financial Sponsors of the Class during the past ten years have been:

Joseph Adams	J. N. McArthur
Belcher Oil Company	Miami Beach Kennel Club
Biscayne Kennel Club	Miami Chamber of Commerce
Burdine's Department Store	Miami Laundry
Kermyt Callahan	Miami Transportation Company
Leslie Cann	Judge Henry Oppenborn
The L. C. Cook Printing Company	Alexander Orr
James Donn	W. L. Philbrick
Oscar Dooley	Fleming G. Railey
First National Bank	Joseph Richter
Florida National Bank	Sears, Roebuck Company
Florida Power and Light Company	Jacob Sher
Byron Freeland	James Sullivan
Charles Fuchs	A. M. Tyler
Linsey Hopkins	Arthur Unger
Dr. J. H. Keene	William Urmev
E. B. Malone	Mitchell Wolfson

