

**A CONDENSED HISTORY OF
PENFIELD CHRISTIAN HOME**

by Jack V. Colwell

Based on the Book

**Penfield Christian Home: Reclaiming Alcohol and
Drug Addicted Men through Christ and Christian Love**

by Waldo P. Harris III

A CONDENSED HISTORY OF PENFIELD CHRISTIAN HOME

This brief history is a condensed version of the book *Penfield Christian Home: Reclaiming Alcohol and Drug Addicted Men through Christ and Christian Love* by Dr. Waldo P. Harris, III. Dr. Harris was one of the founding fathers of Penfield Home, and has been among its most loyal supporters. His history is based upon thorough study, and is very well documented.

Location on the Original Mercer University Campus

Penfield Christian Home is located on ground that is rich in Baptist heritage. This center for ministering to men with alcohol and drug abuse problems is on the original Mercer University Campus. Penfield Christian Home is proud of this historic connection and its perpetuation of Baptist missions, education, and benevolence. An account of Penfield's ministry would be incomplete without a description of Mercer's origin.

A history written by Dr. Spright Dowell, a former Mercer president, tells how the Baptist University began. A \$2,500 bequest for education by Josiah Penfield was announced at the annual Georgia Baptist Convention meeting in 1829. Mr. Penfield was a successful Savannah jeweler from Connecticut who had become a leading Baptist layman. His will stipulated that Georgia Baptists should match his gift, a challenge that was promptly met.

In 1832 the Georgia Baptist Convention voted to establish a school for men that would combine study with work. A 141 acre tract seven miles north of Greensboro was purchased, and Mercer opened in January of 1833. A manual labor school from a farm near Eatonton agreed to disband and merge with Mercer. Its ten students and principal gave a boost to the new school's beginning.

The school at Penfield was named for Jesse Mercer, a noted Baptist leader of his time. The community was named in honor of Josiah Penfield. During its early

years the community grew and the school prospered. The town had numerous stores, banks, and cotton warehouses, and a grist mill, sock mill, and cannery. In its early years Mercer fared well under the leadership of five strong presidents.

After forty years, though, Mercer was facing insurmountable problems. The War Between the States had taken its toll. The enrollment was down because many young men went to war instead of school. The war also had claimed money that Mercer desperately needed. Baptist Convention leaders were asking for a new and more central location.

Among trustees, convention messengers, and students, those who favored retaining the Penfield location were a small minority. A few argued that a larger town would subject students to higher expenses and more vices. The majority contended, though, that a less secluded location would provide a broader education. One senior student stated that in absence of the refining influence of female society, students were becoming “educated gawks.”

The final session at Penfield concluded in December of 1870, and Mercer moved to Macon. In order to appease unhappy Penfield citizens, Mercer provided salaries for two high school teachers in Penfield. By 1877, though, Mercer was no longer able to support these teachers. In 1880 Mercer made another conciliatory act when it transferred its Penfield property to the Georgia Baptist Association. This is the local Association that covers about four counties in the area where Penfield is located.

The Association attempted without much success to operate a high school on the old Mercer property. Within less than a decade the Association transferred the property to Penfield Baptist Church. The little congregation admirably handled the huge task of running a school and keeping up historic buildings. It managed to operate nine grades until the 1950s. By that time three buildings remained on the

property. These included the chapel, which was used for church, the science-academic building, and the old president's home.

The science-academic building was destroyed by a fire of an unknown cause in 1977. The chapel building continues to be the home of the small congregation known as Penfield Baptist Church. The old president's home, which was idle for many years, would become the birthplace of Penfield Christian Home.

The Vision of a Rehabilitation Center for Alcoholics

In 1972 Penfield Baptist Church attempted to sell twenty acres of property that included the old president's home. The building had deteriorated, and the church was financially unable to repair it. After a year, however, no acceptable offers for the property were made. An appeal was made to the Georgia Baptist Association, and a long-range study committee was appointed.

In the meantime an inspired idea came out of Penfield Baptist Church. John Colclough, a deacon, proposed turning the old president's home into a rehabilitation center for alcoholics. Pastor Clayton Sanders was initially skeptical of the idea because of the building's condition and lack of funds. Mr. Colclough persisted in pursuing this act of faith, however. He suggested visiting with Rev. Charles Herring, a nearby pastor who has successfully recovered from alcohol addiction. Donors immediately became interested in helping, and one asked how to make out a check. Without hesitation, Rev. Sanders said, "Make it to Penfield Christian Home," and the name has stuck.

For several years the vision of Penfield Christian Home was studied and pursued. In December of 1973 Rev. Sanders made a formal appeal to Dr. Waldo P. Harris, III, Director of Missions for the Georgia Baptist Association. Dr. Harris was a member of the aforementioned long-range study committee and of the Georgia Baptist Historical Society. Dr. Harris presented the need and the proposal

to Dr. Searcy Garrison, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Georgia Baptist Convention. Dr. Garrison was very supportive of the vision for Penfield Christian Home.

By 1976 Rev. Bob Pless had become pastor of Penfield Baptist Church. He was an avid supporter of establishing the center for alcoholics, and has been one its most tireless workers. The revered Baptist minister and writer, Dr. Louie D. Newton, became interested in the Penfield vision, and offered counsel. His advice was invaluable in relation to legal matters, incorporation, constitution, and bylaws.

The initial board of directors for Penfield included five men who worked hard to pursue the vision. These were Clayton Sanders, Bob Pless, John Colclough, Albert W. Huyck, Jr., and Waldo P. Harris III. Penfield Christian Home, Inc. was officially incorporated by Georgia's Secretary of State on November 9, 1977. Extensive bylaws were adopted. The Internal Revenue Service approved a request for tax exempt status. By 1979 the long but essential stage of planning had been completed. The time was ripe for the Penfield dream to be realized.

The Sacrificial Work of Charles and Viola Herring

Rev. Charles Herring was a giant among the founding fathers of Penfield Christian Home. He was the first program director for treatment of clients. He served as pastor of Hephzibah Baptist Church in the Georgia Baptist Association from 1957 to 1980. He began directing the treatment program at Penfield without pay in 1978 while continuing to serve the church. When he was at church for Sunday duties and prayer meeting John Colclough stayed with the clients in his absence. Clients were provided an eight-week treatment program without charge.

In November of 1978 the trustees voted to make a full-time resident director available beginning in January. No housing was provided for him, though, until a used mobile home was purchased in April of 1980. After several months with no

pay, Rev. Herring was eventually given a meager salary of \$50 per week. His wife, Viola, had to find employment to support them as he fulfilled his calling. In her spare time, she helped cook for the residents! In their late fifties, the Herrings left a successful pastorate and beautiful home to initiate the Penfield ministry.

Rev. Herring did not use modern methods for treating addiction, such as Twelve Steps and the disease model. He did not believe in Alcoholics Anonymous or use its programs. He believed alcohol addiction to be a sin. He preached Jesus Christ and getting right with God. His program for clients consisted of Bible study, preaching, and scripture memorization. Sunday attendance at Penfield Baptist Church was required. Rev. Herring also believed in work therapy. Clients were required to do manual work on the farm and to fulfill daily chores.

Although his approach might be considered old-fashioned, glowing success testimonies came from Rev. Herring's 6½ years of service. Exciting victories were described in his annual reports to the Georgia Baptist Association. His first client wrote, "Penfield does not offer the comfort of a Hilton hotel; nor do they promise a magic potion to eliminate the desire for drink. They **do** offer a Christian atmosphere and spiritual guidance for some who have experienced the same pitfalls, but fortunately turn their lives around through the grace of God. My life has been changed dramatically since entering PCH."

In 1982 Rev. Herring wrote, "The second man to come to Penfield Christian Home was Bill C. Both he and his wife were alcoholics—lost, without hope. Their five children were placed in foster homes. Through God's grace, Bill was saved; so was his wife. They were able to reclaim their children, and are an active family in Friendship Baptist Church, Myrtle Beach, S. C."

In a report to the Association in 1983, Rev. Herring wrote, "Of the thirty-eight people who have been saved or reconciled to God there are one hundred and eight whose lives have been changed. For example, Bill C.'s salvation involved

his wife and five children. David S.'s salvation involved his wife and two children. We don't know how many lives they have influenced. How much is a home worth? How much is a daddy worth? How much is a soul worth?"

Rev. Herring retired in 1985, and he died in 1987. Penfield Christian Home owes a great debt to his sacrificial service. In struggling with personal and institutional lack of funds he always believed that the Lord would provide. With that faith he gave himself completely to the men he served and to his God. He was blessed with a compassionate wife, without whom he could not have fulfilled his mission. Viola was a totally committed partner who worked tirelessly and gave her full support. She has continued to serve on the board of directors for Penfield Christian Home.

Penfield becomes Ministry of Georgia Baptist Convention

Several significant developments occurred during the 1980s at Penfield Christian Home. The ownership of the property was transferred back to Mercer University in 1983. The Georgia Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board began giving financial support in 1985. Penfield Christian Home became a mission ministry of the Georgia Baptist Convention. Rev. Ed Onley was the Convention's employee who was entrusted with supervising the Penfield program. The Board of Directors was expanded to thirty persons from across the state.

After consultation with Convention leaders, Rev. Onley brought a recommendation for a new program director in 1985. Rev. Jim Vogt of Oklahoma City was a certified alcohol counselor with a farming and ministry background. He and his wife, Beth, visited Penfield as early as February. He was elected and on the field shortly after Rev. Herring retired.

Rev. Vogt had a colorful background that included mistakes and tragedy. In rebelling against a strict Mennonite background, he began drinking heavily as a teenager. His drinking accelerated during his time in military service. As a young adult he was shaken by a tragic automobile accident. His wife was seriously injured and a friend's daughter was killed in a wreck caused by a drunk driver. Rev. Vogt said that when he hit "rock bottom" at age 27 he accepted Christ as his Savior.

At age 33 he enrolled at Oklahoma Baptist University. His family of five adjusted to an income of only \$500 a month. A further tragedy struck when his wife was diagnosed with acute leukemia and died within a week. Rev. Vogt was sorely tempted to return to drinking. He completed his degree, though, and served some Oklahoma pastorates. He was hired to direct Grace Rescue Mission by Ed Onley, who later persuaded him to come to Penfield.

Rev. Vogt described his approach to working with alcoholics as "tough love." He was also comfortable with the physical work and activities associated with farming. His wife, Beth, proved to be an excellent companion for him and his work. She related well socially, and was greatly appreciated by women in the churches. She directed food preparation for clients, and was noted for her delicious soup.

The program at Penfield became more highly organized during the late 1980s. Guidelines for admitting clients were more clearly defined, and small fees in accordance with ability to pay were charged. Equipment was donated and purchased. Some part-time helpers, both volunteer and paid, began to be added. Support systems from Alcoholics Anonymous were instigated without abandoning the philosophy that only Jesus Christ has power over alcoholism.

A New Dormitory and Increased Client Capacity

Penfield's history in the late 1980s was distinguished by growth in staff, facilities, and client capacity. Consideration was given to restoring the building that burned in 1977 for use in the Penfield ministry. Many persons representing historical societies and Mercer University urged its preservation. An architect who studied the feasibility of saving the structure did not find this reasonably possible, though. In 1986 the ownership of the Penfield property had been transferred from Mercer to the Georgia Baptist Convention. Attention turned to constructing a dormitory in order to increase client capacity.

Prior to 1988 Rev. Jim Vogt had been assisted only by a part-time helper and a summer youth worker. Before the completion of the new dormitory Rev. Ken Klun became Penfield's second full-time paid staff member. A native of Milwaukee, Rev. Klun began drinking alcoholic beverages as a teenager. As young adults he and his wife were active in a Lutheran church. Several years later they were divorced, due in part to his alcoholism. Shortly afterward Rev. Klun had what he describes as a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. He became a Southern Baptist.

Rev. Klun entered New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1984. He knew that most Southern Baptist Churches would not hire divorced persons, but he worked hard. A full-time student and night shift employee, he also did volunteer work with alcoholics and drug addicts. The seminary president, Dr. Landrum Leavell, was impressed by his dedication. He recommended him to Rev. Ed Onley for the position at Penfield. This was the beginning of what would prove to be a long tenure of service.

In the meantime plans for building a new dormitory had progressed. A groundbreaking was celebrated on July 12, 1987. Dr. Waldo Harris enlisted 210

volunteer workers to construct the building. Rev. Ed Onley and Rev. Jim Vogt worked diligently in fund-raising. When the dormitory was completed it was dedicated in a special ceremony on June 21, 1988. It was later named “The Charles and Viola Herring Dormitory.” New staff and building space nearly doubled the client capacity so that around thirty men could be enrolled.

Changes and Progress in the Early 1990s

Penfield Christian Home dealt with several matters related to property and organization as a new decade began. In 1990 a neglected tract of land adjacent to the administration building (old president’s home) was purchased. An old house on this property was torn down immediately. This property was not given to the Georgia Baptist Convention, but belongs to Penfield Christian Home.

Early in 1991 the director’s home, where the Vogts lived, was suddenly destroyed by fire. Churches in the Georgia Baptist Association responded with generosity to help the Vogts in this crisis. The house was insured for around \$50,0000, and was rebuilt largely by volunteer labor in a new location.

After the Georgia Baptist Convention had operated Penfield Christian Home for five years, the IRS questioned this relationship. It ruled that Penfield was not an integrated auxiliary of the Convention because its activities are not “exclusively religious.” Prior to this ruling the Convention had handled funds, kept records, and paid bills for the Penfield ministry. The trustees (directors) had offered prayer support, attended meetings, and helped raise funds, but were given little authority.

After the IRS ruling the board of directors assumed the major responsibility for operating Penfield Christian Home. The Georgia Baptist Convention would continue to own the property and support the ministry. The Convention, however, would not elect the board of directors. This shift of authority necessitated better organization, and the constitution and bylaws were revised and expanded in 1991.

As the ministry at Penfield grew a need was recognized for an administrator and a secretary-bookkeeper. Staley and Jerrie Langham were introduced as prospects for these positions in July of 1991. An ordained minister, Rev. Langham had broad experiences in both ministry and business. His wife had an impressive background that suited her for the job. Appropriate job descriptions were adopted and the two were hired.

An annual meeting for Penfield Christian Home was instigated, and the first meeting was on November 2, 1991. This is a meeting of the corporation, which includes contributors, directors, and the staff. Churches that make regular gifts to Penfield can send up to ten delegates to the annual meeting. Individuals who donate at least \$25 during the year are also members of the corporation. The program includes worship, inspiration, reports, music, and a message, followed by lunch. This meeting has continued annually on the first Saturday of November.

A Ministry for Women, Staff Changes

The Penfield board of directors became increasingly aware of the need for a similar program for alcoholic women. As early as 1992 this need was mentioned at a board meeting, and by 1993 a trust fund was established. In 1995 two brothers from Lavonia gave a 32 acre farm and a five-room house for this ministry. This was the beginning of HEART Ministries, which is another exciting story. Although HEART Ministries is separate from Penfield, the two work together in many ways, including fund-raising. Reports from HEART are given at all Penfield board meetings.

The Reclaimer, a newsletter for Penfield Christian Home, was first published in February of 1994. Its name was taken from Penfield's stated purpose, "Reclaiming Alcoholics and Drug Addicts through Christ and Christian Love."

Since then *The Reclaimer* has been mailed to contributors and supporters about three times each year. It contains news, success testimonies from clients, pictures, and lists of needed items and of contributors.

Penfield's relationship with the Georgia Baptist Convention continued to be discussed and studied. Although technicalities prevented the Home's being an agency of the Convention, connections have remained strong. The Convention continues to promote and support Penfield and is represented at all board meetings. The Convention pays the salaries of the program director and assistant on Penfield's staff.

Rev. Jim Vogt resigned and concluded a 9½ year ministry in January of 1995. His work had begun in an old house and ended in a new dormitory. Through his ministry numerous addicts accepted Christ as Savior and many broken families were reunited. Appreciation was expressed to him and his wife.

The search for a new program director led to Rev. Bryant Miller. A graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Rev. Miller is a substance abuse counselor and supervisor of counselors. He also has a broad background in business and ministry. He and his wife, Donna, moved into the house provided for them and he began his work in early 1995. Vic Allen, who had completed the treatment program, became a contract counselor to assist Rev. Miller and Rev. Klun.

Continued Expansion into the Twenty-First Century

Penfield Home continued to enlarge its facilities, staff, and ministry as the old century ended and the 2000s began. In January of 1996 Jerrie Langham, the secretary-bookkeeper was stricken with a brain hemorrhage. This sudden tragedy necessitated an immediate replacement. Rev. Lem Clark, who served a nearby

pastorate, was employed to assist Rev. Staley Langham on an interim basis. He was later promoted and given the title of administrative assistant.

At the board meeting on July 10, 1997, Rev. Langham resigned as administrator. He told the board that he could no function effectively in his work. His wife had been disabled by her stroke, and his aging mother could no longer care for a son who had Down syndrome. The Langhams were honored and presented a plaque.

Rev. Lem Clark, after serving well as assistant under Rev. Langham, was promoted to the position of administrator. A graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, he had served for fourteen years as pastor of Bethesda Baptist Church in Union Point. His wife, Sandy, is a cosmetologist and an active church leader. The Clarks have four grown children.

The Penfield staff led an expanding program ably into the twenty-first century. Clients filled facilities to capacity, many made successful recoveries, and too many were turned away for lack of space. A growing program called for restructuring according to modern standards. A local consultant volunteered his time to work with a committee in 2003. Since the Georgia Baptist Convention was paying two salaries, consistency for all employees was a factor in the study. New job descriptions were written, and the constitution and bylaws were revised. The administrator became the executive director.

Additional counselors were needed to help with the growing number of clients. Butch Scruggs and Steven Howard were among those who were employed and served for periods of time. Rev. David Jordan joined the staff as an intern counselor in December of 2002. A highly qualified minister, he had reverted to an old alcohol problem after a marital breakup. He had been through the treatment program at Penfield, and had become pastor of Penfield Baptist Church.

A native Georgian, Rev. Jordan was a graduate of Brewton Parker College and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He had served as associate and senior pastor in churches. He had been minister of evangelism at Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth and a Church Planter with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. As an intern, he continued studies in substance abuse counseling, and became a full counselor in May of 2003.

Rev. David Burris joined the Penfield staff in May of 2003 as a substance abuse counselor. He is a graduate of Carson Newman College, where he was a teaching assistant in Greek, Religion, and Psychology. A pastor for twenty-three years, he ministered to prisoners with addiction problems in Chattooga County for ten years.

Todd McGann is another essential person on the Penfield Staff. After completing the program as a client, he became office assistant in 2001. He has an associate degree in electronics, and ten years of experience in the computer field. He runs the front offices, maintains computers, and leads a Twelve Step program.

A New Building Proposed and Constructed

The growing ministry at Penfield called for a new building to meet growing needs. Almost as many men were being turned away as were being served. By early 2003 a sketch of the proposed structure was presented to the trustees. The new building would increase bed capacity from thirty to fifty. It would also provide office and conference rooms, and space for recreation and family visits. By this time the Georgia Baptist Convention had deeded the property back to Mercer University. This presented a barrier to building, but Penfield has a long-term renewable lease on the property. Trustees saw the need to build to be greater than any hindrances.

A large sum to begin a building fund was provided in 2002 by Harmony Grove Baptist Church in the Fairburn Association. The struggling church disbanded and divided its assets among some Baptist agencies. A check for \$132,322.40 was presented to Penfield Christian Home. Through volunteer labor and donated materials a building valued at 1.6 million dollars could be constructed for approximately \$450,000. Funds on hand grew to around \$250,000 through banquets, pledges, and other promotions.

When the fund was within \$200,000 of the projected cost, work began on the building in the summer of 2004. The new building would provide 15,000 square feet of space, including a full-court gymnasium. The concrete slab was poured in the late spring. Sixty men representing teams from Georgia and Alabama began work on June 17. Within a week all exterior walls were framed and trusses were set. Immediately afterward, 48 men from North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and New York came to continue the work. They set windows, began roofing and wiring, and framed the front porch. Local churches, residents, and contractors continued installing wiring and sheetrock, heating and cooling systems, and alarm and sprinkler systems as the construction moved toward completion.

The construction was virtually completed in time for Penfield's twenty-fifth anniversary celebration in November of 2004. A large number of people were present to tour the new facilities, enjoy lunch together in the gymnasium, and attend the annual session in the chapel. During the next year all of the new construction was completed, some landscaping was done, and renovation began on the old facilities. By the time of the annual meeting in November of 2005 almost all of the work had been completed. The client capacity was increased, the staff was expanded, and financial support continued to come. Office space was increased, rooms for families of clients were provided, and good recreational facilities for clients were made available. Most importantly, the program for

clients was increased so that more men could be given the advantage of the outstanding ministry that is offered.

Mercer University had its beginning on the Penfield property. In its early history the school prospered, but circumstances required moving away after forty years. But God had another plan for the hallowed ground. A century later a center for helping alcoholics and drug addicts was established there. The ministry of Penfield Christian Home continues to grow, help families, and honor God.

Some Exciting Success Stories

Efforts to reclaim alcoholics obviously are not always successful. Many clients drop out or have relapses after some success. The Penfield program does not have the resources to do extensive follow-up work. The staff believes, though, that Penfield has a high success rate in comparison with other treatment programs. This is attributed to the Christ-centered approach that motivates the men and has power to reclaim their lives.

Ken Klun, who has been assistant program director since 1988, related several success stories at a directors meeting. He said that many of the men who have been helped later make contact to express appreciation. These are some stories Rev. Klun shared:

Randall came to Penfield “kicking and screaming” in 1988. His brother, a Baptist preacher, brought him against his will. After a while Randall’s rebellious spirit was broken, and he completed the program. He stayed as a volunteer for two years. He became a successful businessman who now employs several recovering alcoholics. He also owns several houses, which he rents to people who are overcoming addiction.

Larry went through the treatment program at Penfield in 1991. He was on medical disability, and stayed a while as a volunteer. When he left he became

involved with a church in the Atlanta area, and worked with families of prisoners until his death.

Wallace went through the Penfield program in 1993, and stayed afterward as a volunteer. After leaving he became highly successful in a business career. He is now customer service manager for an internationally known Fortune 500 agency.

Nathan was also at Penfield around 1993. He later returned to college and became an addiction counselor. He now works for the federal government in that capacity.

Jerry completed treatment at Penfield in 1994, and afterward worked as a volunteer. Later he went to college and seminary and earned a master's degree. He became a vocational rehabilitation counselor and worked with alcoholics and other addicts. He is now a middle school teacher.

These stories of success are what Penfield is all about. **To God be the glory!**