

2021

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Recommended Citation

McMillan, James L. (2021) "From News-sheet to Scholarly Quarterly: A Brief History of Discipliana," *Journal of Discipliana*: Vol. 74 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.discipleshistory.org/journalofdiscipliana/vol74/iss1/10>

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From News-sheet to Scholarly Quarterly: A Brief History of *Discipliana*

By James L. McMillan, Managing Editor, the *Journal of Discipliana*

Introduction

During the 80th year of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society's existence, January 2021 marked the rebirth of the Society's scholarly publication *Discipliana* under a new name, with a broader scope, the *Journal of Discipliana*. This essay will help new subscribers to the *Journal of Discipliana* understand, and past subscribers to *Discipliana* recall, the birth, growth and significance of *Discipliana* in its eight decades.

Why Give It THAT Name?

We often hear remarks on the peculiarity of the name "Discipliana." Why did its founder choose that name? What does it mean? The addition of the suffix -iana¹ to a name, in this case "Disciples," created a name for the collection of objects, facts, stories and literature connected with the Disciples. It was a fitting name for a periodical that would deal with anything pertaining to the religious group known as the Disciples.

Over the decades the periodical carried different names, beginning as *Discipliana*, then expanding in July 1953 to *The Harbinger and Discipliana*. This longer title reflected a special emphasis on promotional and development activities.² The return to the short title was in December 1959. This title prevailed until 2007 when the subtitle "a journal of Stone-Campbell history" started appearing with *Discipliana* on the covers. Finally, in 2013 the title was changed to *Disciples History Magazine* before publication ceased in 2014.

What Was Published?

Discipliana began as a mimeographed news-sheet in the early 1940s as a publication of students who were members of the Ministerial Association of Culver Stockton College, under the supervision of Claude Spencer, with Carl B. Robinson as Managing Editor.³

It is possible in this brief essay to give only a survey of the contents of *Discipliana*. In 1997, David I. McWhirter updated an index of the journal he first compiled in 1967 while at Christian Theological Seminary. The 1997 edition is 263 pages, with an estimated 13,000+ entries.⁴

From the famous to the infamous, writers chronicled the history of the Stone-Campbell Movement. As expected, Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone received a lot of press. Readers needed to hear about controversial people like L. L. Pinkerton, a "liberal" and one of the early promoters of

¹ See, for example, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/iana>. Accessed 10 January 2021.

² *Harbinger and Discipliana* 19.4 (December 1959) 18.

³ For more details about the history of *Discipliana*, see: Claude E. Spencer, "Our 20th Year," *Discipliana* 20.1 (March 1960) 2; 15; "Celebrating Fifty Years of Publication," *Discipliana* 50.4 (Winter 1990) 47 – 54; Peter Morgan, "A Brief History of Our Publications," *Discipliana* 57.4 (Winter 1997) 98; Chapter 13, "Publications" in James M. Seale, *Forward from the Past: The First Fifty Years of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society* (Nashville: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1991) 125 – 130.

⁴ His index is online in the DCHS Digital Commons: <https://digitalcommons.discipleshistory.org/discipliana/64/>.

instrumental music. The stories of defectors—those who left the fold—needed to be told. *Discipliana* was a front runner in articles about Disciples women, by Disciples women.

In 1960, looking back over *Discipliana's* first twenty years, Spencer noted the content was broad, perhaps too broad for a journal that aspired to be scholarly:

In the beginning there was some doubt that enough material could be found for a quarterly publication such as this. For nineteen years we have put together from four to twelve issues a year and our big problem has not been lack of material, but what to put in and what to leave out. We have acknowledged and described gifts; detailed our wants and needs; outlined our program; reprinted materials from earlier days; noted research in progress; gossiped about Disciples, books, and history; compiled bibliographies; featured guest writers; offered varied services to researchers; advertised materials for sale; written news items about Society members; published more trivia than any other publication; and above all, urged support of the Historical Society.⁵

The emphasis was sometimes narrowly focused to provide updates on special projects such as the move to Nashville from Canton, Missouri, and the design and construction of the Phillips Memorial Building.

As early as August 1953, DCHS discussed the desirability of establishing

“...a quarterly journal to represent the best of Disciple scholarship in theology, history, Biblical studies, and the practical ministry.”⁶

This aspiration did not become a reality until 1993, more than four decades later. Some scholarly articles appeared from 1953 to 1993, but it is misleading to call *Discipliana* a strictly scholarly journal during those four decades. Many valuable articles did appear. The Claude Spencer bibliographies, for example, are valuable. This writer has used them to great profit.

With the return to the title *Discipliana* in 1959, the emphasis became more focused, reflecting the original purpose of “an historical and bibliographical periodical dealing with the Brotherhood of the Disciples of Christ.”⁷ Spencer also stated

Perhaps, promotion will be less obvious but more subtle. We hope to bring interesting news of Disciple historical and literary doings, print useful bibliographies, and keep our readers acquainted with what is going on at Society headquarters.⁸

Establishing a balance between historical and bibliographical articles and news about the Society, such as donors and memberships, proved difficult. Even when *Discipliana* evolved in 1993 into “a more scholarly yet readable journal of history,” James Seale noted that there would still be

⁵ *Discipliana* 20.1 (March 1960) 15.

⁶ *Harbinger and Discipliana* 13.3 (August 1953) 26.

⁷ *Harbinger and Discipliana* 19.4 (December 1959) 18.

⁸ *Discipliana* 20.1 (March 1960) 15

“brief articles about the establishment of Named Funds but we will not carry the new members or current donors list.”⁹

Noting its potential content, but still displaying an unwillingness to break the mold of *Discipliana* as a news-sheet, DCHS President James Seale stated:

We do solicit articles for consideration for publishing. Articles should be not more than 20 typed, double-spaced pages. This includes footnotes. Wherever possible we would like to have the article submitted in print form, two copies, and on disk. With articles this length there will be room in *Discipliana* for short book reviews and *for news of the Historical Society*. We look forward to 1994. (Emphasis added.)

Beginning in 1993, in addition to an editor and managing or associate editor(s), an editorial committee worked with the editors to review articles and suggest topics for articles.

Because *Discipliana's* focus became scholarly articles, to provide news about the Society, the DCHS staff created the ancillary publications *We're History* (1997-2003), *The Link* (2004) and *Streamlines* (2006 – 2014). These publications also included membership and donor information.¹⁰ With the name change to **Disciples History Magazine**, however, Glenn Carson, Editor, stated,

It's just that it seemed time to update the name of our journal to match where we are today – and where we're going. **Disciples History Magazine** will still feature the quality you've come to expect in *Discipliana*, while at the same time offering more news and features.

Beginning in 2008¹¹ there were fewer articles and more space devoted to promotion and announcements. Ironically, this reflected a return to a news-sheet. For example, many issues featured announcements of events that were not sponsored by DCHS. Scholarly articles decreased in number during those years because of the lower frequency of publication, from quarterly to biannually.

Regular Columns

Discipliana's pages carried some regular columns by key staff or board members. For example:

Jim's Journey (James McKinney)

Spencer's Observations (Claude Spencer)

Adventures in Biography (Eva Jean Wrather)

By Way of Serendipity (Various writers)

⁹ James Seale, “From the President’s Desk,” *Discipliana* 53.1 (Spring 1993) 2. Names of new members and contributors were to appear in the Annual Reports of the Society.

¹⁰ These publications have been digitized, with plans to post them in Digital Commons.

¹¹ “*Discipliana* was not published in 2007 but volumes are sequential from 2006 to 2008.” Quoted from a slip of paper bound with volumes 67 – 69 in the DCHS collection.

Just as I Lived It (Lester G. McAllister)

Frequency

Although *Discipliana* began as a quarterly and continued so for its first twelve years (1941 – January, 1953), its frequency was erratic from Volume 13 through Volume 28: the number of issues varied from four to as high as twelve (1954 only). Volumes 29 (1969) through 66 (2006) were quarterly, the only exception being Volume 33 (1973) with only one issue.¹² From 2008 through 2014, two issues appeared each year.

Who Were the People?

DCHS is known for its unsurpassed collection of Stone-Campbell materials, particularly the items from the nineteenth century. The thousands of books, periodicals, pamphlets, biographical files, and personal papers represent people, not just words on paper. We should not forget that *Discipliana*, like all other periodicals, was the result of hard-working people. Besides editors and writers, who get the credit for a publication, there are secretaries, graphic artists, printers, wives and husbands of writers who supported them by their encouragement. Implicit (and often explicit) was the role of the DCHS presidents and trustees in their support and encouragement. In several cases, the DCHS president served as the editor of *Discipliana*.¹³ The donations of hundreds of DCHS members and friends funded the publication and mailing costs of *Discipliana*. In this section of its history, we acknowledge those who did the hard work to get each issue published.

Editors

This chart presents the people who served in editorial roles for *Discipliana* from its 1941 founding until its suspension in 2014.

Year(s)	Editor(s)	Assistant, Associate or Managing Editor(s)
1941 - 1965	Claude E. Spencer	Carl B. Robinson (1940s; Managing) Mary K. Whitehurst (1940s; Assistant) James E. McKinney (1953 – 1958; Assistant)
1966 – 1970	Willis R. Jones and Marvin D. Williams, Jr.	
1971 - 1972	Hugh E. Williams and Marvin D. Williams, Jr.	
1973	Marvin D. Williams, Jr.	
1974 – 1982	Roland K. Huff and Marvin D. Williams, Jr. (1974, 1975)	David I. McWhirter (1977 – 1982; Assistant)

¹² The DCHS president's position was unfilled that year, which might explain why only one issue was published. Marvin D. Williams, Jr., DCHS librarian, who also served as co-editor from 1966 to 1972, was sole editor of that issue.

¹³ Willis R. Jones, Hugh E. Williams, Roland K. Huff, Richard L. Harrison, and Glenn Thomas Carson all served as editors.

1983 - 1992	James M. Seale	David I. McWhirter (1983 – 1990; Assistant) Charlotte S Rose (1991 - 1992; Assistant)
1993	Richard L. Harrison, Jr. (for Issues 1 and 2) ¹⁴ D. Newell Williams (for Issues 3 and 4)	Charlotte S. Rose (1993; Managing)
1994 – 2006	D. Newell Williams	Edward W. Dodds (1994 – 1998; Managing) Lynne Morgan (1995 – 2004; Managing) ¹⁵ Kristin Hildebrand (1999; Production Editor) Marlene L. Patterson (2005, 2006; Managing)
2007	No volume published.	
2008	Glenn Thomas Carson (Editor)	
2009 - 2012	Glenn Thomas Carson (Editor-in-Chief)	Kristin Russell (2009 – 2012; Managing)
2013 - 2014	Kristin Russell (Editor-in-Chief)	

Editorial Committee

In 1991 the DCHS Board of Trustees made plans to create “an editorial board to plan for articles which need to be written and to make certain all facets of the history of the Movement are covered.”¹⁶

In 1993, an Editorial Committee began; its members were listed on the inside of the front covers in that volume and every succeeding volume through 2006. In addition, the Editorial Committee at that time led the newly established Stone-Campbell Historical Seminar, which would “encompass up to three lectures, symposia, personal research time, a sharing of current historical concerns and ideas for research.”¹⁷

¹⁴ *Discipliana* 53.1 (Spring 1993) 33. Harrison’s decision to become President of Lexington Theological Seminary explains his short tenure as *Discipliana* editor.

¹⁵ *Discipliana* 64.2 (Summer 2004) 33. “Lynne, though her name has not appeared on the inside cover, has been “managing editor” of the journal, mailing submissions to reviewers, putting the text on pages, and making sure that the editor stayed on schedule.”

¹⁶ Seale, *Forward* 130.

¹⁷ *Discipliana* 53.1 (Spring 1993) 34.

People who served on the Editorial Committee:

Name	Year(s)	Affiliation
Richard J. Cherok	2002 - 2006	Christian Churches/Churches of Christ
Anthony L. Dunnavant	1994 - 2000	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Douglas A. Foster	1996 - 2006	Churches of Christ (a cappella)
Kenneth Henry	1993 - 1998	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Richard T. Hughes	1993 - 1995	Churches of Christ (a cappella)
Nadia M. Lahutsky	2003 - 2006	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Loretta Long	2001 - 2003	Churches of Christ (a cappella)
Daisy L. Machado	1998	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Edward Robinson	2004 - 2006	Churches of Christ (a cappella)
Henry E. Webb	1993 – 1997; 1999 - 2006	Christian Churches/Churches of Christ
Newell Williams	1993	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Eva Jean Wrather	1993 - 1998	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Karen-Marie Yust	2001 - 2002	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Editorial Consultants

Printed on the inside of the front cover of the Summer 1994 issue, for the first time, are Editorial Consultants.¹⁸ Editorial Consultants served until 2006. Their number varied from five to as high as nine, with eight being the norm.

Debra Hull, who served as the secretary to the DCHS Board of Trustees and on the Publications Committee in 1994, surmised that with the decision for *Discipliana* to become a scholarly journal, adding the Editorial Consultants demonstrated a desire to involve scholars from the three streams.¹⁹

People who served as Editorial Consultants:

Name	Years	Affiliation
Carisse Berryhill	1996 - 2006	Churches of Christ (a cappella)
Paul M. Blowers	1994 - 2006	Christian Churches/Churches of Christ
James O. Duke	1994 - 2006	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

¹⁸ *Discipliana* 54.2 (Summer 1994) inside front cover. Articles in that issue by the Editor and President say nothing about their responsibilities or their relationship to the Editorial Committee. In the report of the Publications Committee from the Minutes of the May 1, 1994, Board of Trustees Meeting is the only reference found so far with information about the editorial consultants: “Ms. Hull reported...a plan to list the names of editorial consultants in future issues of *Discipliana*.”

¹⁹ Phone call with Hull, June 29, 2021. The imbalance of the representation from the three streams is glaring, with Blowers being the only person from the Christian Church/Churches of Christ.

Douglas A. Foster	1994, 1995.	Churches of Christ (a cappella)
Richard T. Hughes	1996 - 2006	Churches of Christ (a cappella)
David A. Jones	1994 - 2006	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Erma Jean Loveland	1996 - 2006	Churches of Christ (a cappella)
Daisy L. Machado	1999 - 2006	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Mark G. Toulouse	1994 - 2006	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Eva Jean Wrather	1999 - 2001	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Scholar's Essay Selection

Discipliana was not published in 2007. When publication resumed in 2008, there is no longer an Editorial Committee or Editorial Consultants. A group of three people, Richard Cherok from the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, Gary Holloway from the Churches of Christ (a cappella), and Scott D. Seay from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), served as the “Scholar’s Essay Selection.” Their names, however, only appeared in the volumes for 2008 and 2009. They are never officially introduced nor are details given about their function. Based on the group’s name, we conclude they functioned as a review committee, to fulfill the promise stated in later volumes that, “Essays and articles in this journal are published for the first time and are subjected to rigorous academic standards for review and inclusion.”²⁰

What’s Next?

To familiarize scholars and aspiring graduate students with existing articles, the *Discipliana* Index and all issues of *Discipliana* are online in the DCHS Digital Commons. In addition, the spreadsheet from Restoration Serials Index, with some 1,600 entries of authors and titles is online in the DCHS Digital Commons.²¹ Our hope is that access to this information will allow writers to know what has already been written and wonder why hasn’t an article on *this subject* been written? Let us know what you think should have been written. Better yet, write the essay and submit it for consideration for publication!

The *Journal of Discipliana*, the successor to *Discipliana*, is an online, open-access publication with a broader scope. Contemporary issues, for example, are now fair game. Wider access to digitized periodicals, both historical and contemporary, expedites research, allowing for data mining not foreseen by earlier generations of researchers. Our hope is that existing and emerging scholars will take advantage of these resources and carry forward the message of the Stone-Campbell Movement, with its rich traditions.

²⁰ See also 73.1 (Spring 2014) 8: “The primary essay is published for the first time and is subjected to rigorous academic standards for review and inclusion.”

²¹ For the Index, see <https://digitalcommons.discipleshistory.org/discipliana/64/>.
For the Restoration Serials Index entries, see https://digitalcommons.discipleshistory.org/all_periodical_indexes/17/.