

6-1-2004

2004 retirees leave distinctive records of exceptional service to Furman: Clayton guided growth of university's archival collections

Jim Stewart '76
Furman University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine>

Recommended Citation

Stewart, Jim '76 (2004) "2004 retirees leave distinctive records of exceptional service to Furman: Clayton guided growth of university's archival collections," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 47 : Iss. 2 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol47/iss2/12>

This Article is made available online by Journals, part of the Furman University Scholar Exchange (FUSE). It has been accepted for inclusion in Furman Magazine by an authorized FUSE administrator. For terms of use, please refer to the [FUSE Institutional Repository Guidelines](#). For more information, please contact scholarexchange@furman.edu.

2004 retirees leave distinctive records of exceptional serv



Teacher/scholar: Blackwell stands as true exemplar

On most Tuesday afternoons, Albert Blackwell can be found sitting on the floor, sharing stories and songs with elementary school children in one of Greenville's poor-

est neighborhoods. To these children he is simply "Mr. Albert."

The image seems odd for this gentle, modest teacher/scholar who holds degrees from M.I.T. and Harvard, has published five books and, until his retirement this spring after 33 years at Furman, taught courses with titles like "Religion and Culture" and "Religious Approaches to Meaning." But for his colleagues and students, the picture is resonant with Albert's character, of a piece with what and why he teaches.

More familiar are other images: On Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings Albert is usually directing the adult choir at St. James Episcopal Church with demanding patience, explaining how the music illumines the text and reminding the singers that "music is the art of the ever so slightly."

During the academic year, Albert would arrive early for class and often write a "warm-up" question on the board. He would pull the desks into a circle, address the students as "Friends!" and invite their reflections on the assignment. Often he would enrich the discussion with music, poetry or slides of art work.

Visitors to his office were welcomed warmly to a room containing a modest collection of books, a Vermeer print and a Christmas cactus resting on the window sill. Together these images reflected a wise and caring teacher who delighted in his students and his vocation.

In professional circles Albert is highly regarded as a careful, thoughtful scholar with unusual breadth, as is evident in his formal education: a B.S. in physics from M.I.T. and a Ph.D. in religion from Harvard, all the while serving as assistant director of the Harvard Glee Club. His dissertation on Friedrich Schleiermacher, which became his first book, was one of the early contributions to the mid-century Schleiermacher renaissance. His most recent book, *The Sacred in Music* (1999), returns to the study of physics as a vital aid for understanding music theory and exploring the sacramental potential of music. On his last sabbatical Albert and his wife Marian, a gifted poet, collaborated to translate and paraphrase 20 Hebrew Psalms in English to fit the psalm tunes composed by Heinrich Schütz.

Albert's greatest legacy, however, is his teaching excellence, which was formally recognized in 1977 when he received the Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Teaching. Students praise his thoughtful reflections, penetrating questions and uncanny ability to break down the most difficult topics into manageable segments. But most of all they remember his challenge that truth must be embodied in one's convictions and given concrete expression in deeds of compassion, justice and the creation of beauty.

— John Shelley, *Professor of Religion*



Clayton guided growth of university's archival collections

No doubt members of the James B. Duke Library staff were relieved this summer when they learned that J. Glen Clayton would delay his retirement until August

to help with the library's latest (and final) move.

After a year in the new Charlie Peace Wing, operating in tight quarters while the original part of the library was renovated, the staff was ready to return to normalcy — and enjoy the full benefits of their beautifully revamped and expanded surroundings.

They also knew that Clayton was an old hand at this moving stuff. After all, in 1995 he had supervised the move of the library at the International Baptist Theological Seminary across national borders — from Ruschlikon, Switzerland, to Prague in the Czech Republic. With that on his résumé, going from one area of a building to another would be a breeze.

Once the Furman move was complete, though, Clayton, special collections librarian and archivist since 1972, was ready to move on. "This was the perfect job for me," he says. "It's been a vocation and a calling; I was here at the right time. Now it's best to let someone else take things through the next phase."

That person will have a firm foundation from which to operate, thanks to Clayton's work with the Furman Collection and Archives, the Baptist Historical Collection and the South Carolina Collection. He has built Furman's archives, and especially its store of state church records, into one of the leading collections in the South. "It's what researchers, graduate students, cultural historians and genealogists come here to use if they're interested in South Carolina," he says.

A native of Roxboro, N.C., Clayton forged his interest in church history at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He had earned his undergraduate degree in psychology from Wake Forest and considered pursuing a career in pastoral counseling or hospital chaplaincy, but the influence of church historian E. Glenn Hinson spurred him in a different direction.

At Furman, Clayton carried on the work of his mother-in-law, Loulie Latimer Owens, the university's first special collections librarian. The endowment for the archives is named in her honor.

Admired for his warmth and graciousness, Clayton plans to continue working with the *Journal of the South Carolina Baptist Society*, which he founded in 1975, and to write about Baptist history. A skilled craftsman and avid gardener, he is a member of the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, which promotes sustainable agriculture and organic farming.

He will remain active in missions work at Greenville's First Baptist Church, where his wife, Greer, is head of preschool ministries — and where "Mr. Glen" and his guitar often entertain the kids. His new, less structured schedule should also afford him more chances to visit his daughter, Susan Kinghorn '99, and her husband, Warren '97, who live in Durham, N.C.

— Jim Stewart