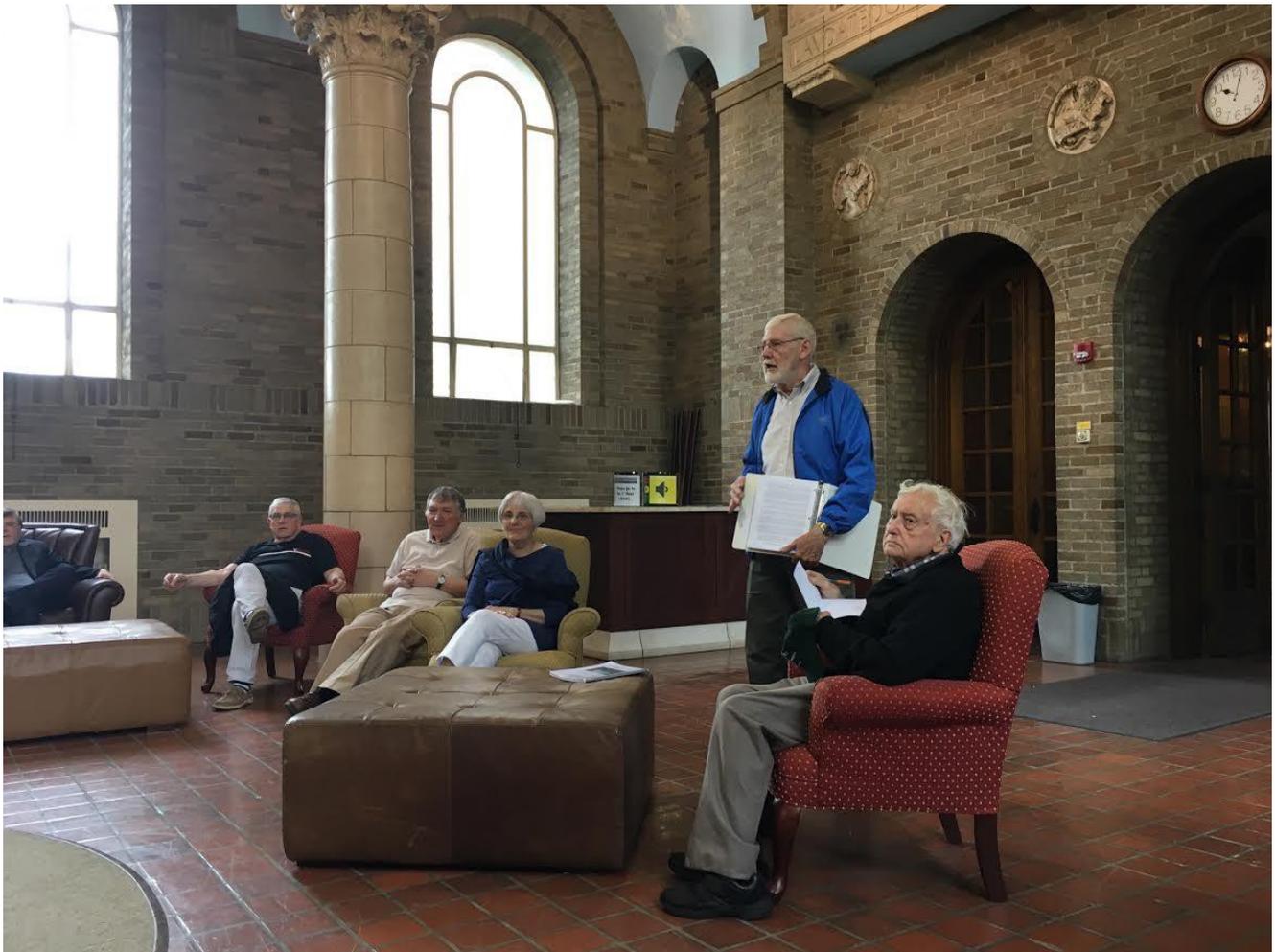


Venard Reunion of the Class of 1967 / David C. McClain

At the request of Mel Walker I hosted members of the Venard class of 1967, as well as some from other years, on Saturday, May 20, 2017, on campus. Fifteen men plus two wives arrived from various locations in the United States, from as far away as Washington, California, and Florida. Most were in their late sixties, though a few were older. Some had not been back to Clarks Summit for 50 years. Most of the men had attended as high school students, one being only 12 when he arrived during the days when this was a Catholic prep school. The high school graduating class of 1967 was the final class before the property was sold, and 2017 marked the 50th anniversary of the closing of the Venard by the Maryknoll Fathers.

I arrived on campus at 9:00 am, accompanied by my wife, Janet, Scott Cleveland, and security guard Nick Arent. Our tour was scheduled to begin at 10:00 in the Jackson Hall rotunda. Since the guests all arrived early we spent time prior to the tour getting acquainted in the second floor of Murphy Memorial Library. The campus was very quiet that morning and we had the place to ourselves. The weather was cool and pleasant. We toured Jackson Hall, floor by floor, then Buckingham Hall, the Underground, the Student Center, and ended with the Recreation Center to end the tour just after 12:00. Security advised us that we could not go up into the bell tower.



Prior to the start of the tour, I addressed our guests with these introductory remarks:

“My name is David McClain and I am honored to be your host today. I welcome you back to the Venard for this special anniversary. Mel Walker, one of Clarks Summit University’s Vice Presidents, made the arrangements with you, then he needed to be in Germany this week so he asked me to lead the tour today. With me are my wife, Janet, and Scott Cleveland, a graduate of the college who now works here as an admissions counselor. This is not my first involvement with Venard reunions. I participated with the class of 1965 and also with a larger reunion in 2009 when I met Fr. George Ratermann two years before he died.

Janet and I moved here from Ohio in April 1968 to work in the library. Brother David was still at the Venard when we arrived. Our family with two small children lived in this building for 2 months as its only residents while the college was completing its final year in Johnson City, NY, one hour north. At the end of May the McClains moved into a rental home off campus and I began to set up the library here. After 44 years of service we retired in 2012, but continue to live in the community. I no longer have daily contact with the college, but I have a notebook of Venard archival materials that I have collected through the years. I will place it in the library today for you to peruse, and then I plan to let Ray Voith post materials from it on his helpful website.

Before we begin our tour, let me give you all the same background information so that I don’t have to repeat myself numerous times to individuals all morning. When the college moved here in the summer of 1968 it was still known as Baptist Bible Seminary, although it was an undergraduate institution. Soon the name was changed to Baptist Bible College of Pa, but after an actual seminary was begun in 1972 most people referred to us as Baptist Bible College & Seminary. In 2015 the name was changed again to Summit University, but that name was challenged by a school in Montana so the name was altered again to avoid a lawsuit, and it became Clarks Summit University in 2016. But, then, your Venard was also known by a variety of names during its history.

And as for the pronunciation of your school, all of the residents of this area including the college family refer to the road out front as Venard Road, although you and I know that the proper pronunciation is Venard [VAY-nard]. Please forgive them, for they know not what they do. Also, most people on the Clarks Summit University campus have the front and the back of this building reversed in their minds. Please overlook that mistake also.

The university property is not as big as it was when you were here. The several acres across the road are now owned by the Heritage Baptist Church and Elan Gardens, a Jewish retirement home. The seminary building property above the lake on this side of the road was sold last year to the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter.

The red barn was torn down in the 1970s and its space was used to build a bookstore which has since closed. The sister’s residence was eliminated 15 years ago. The brother’s residence is now a music building. The pool and the handball court are gone. Meanwhile new buildings have been erected, many of them dormitories because our students do not live in this building. The apple orchard was removed to make room for the dorms.

Changes have been made in this main building, which we call Jackson Hall, in honor of one of our presidents. In my notebook there is a diagram of how the college administration had planned to repurpose this building prior to moving in. Those original plans were changed once the work of relocating began. For instance, they realized that your chapel would not be large enough to function as our chapel, so it became part of the library. If you are wondering where the Baptists have chapel, please understand that we are not enamored with what might be called “sacred space”, so Baptists worship anywhere the room is large enough to hold a crowd, such as our new Recreation Center. And just so you will know, although you referred to the 4 floors in this building as basement, 1, 2 & 3, we have always referred to them as 1, 2, 3 & 4. A helpful elevator was added some years ago.

This college’s enrollment peaked, and like the Venard, changes in society led to a decline in the number of students seeking residential education. Finally, you may want to know that the Lourdesmont property across the street now belongs to the School for the Deaf. Lourdesmont downsized and moved to Scranton.

Our tour will now begin in the 2nd floor of the university library, once almost my second home.” The visitors seemed thrilled with this opportunity to view what was once home for them many years ago. They were impressed with the beauty of the campus and were amazed at the ways in which all spaces in Jackson Hall were being utilized. Some of them took photos along the way. Many comments were made about significant places in their main building (Jackson Hall) where they slept, ate, studied and worshipped. Several youthful pranks were confessed, such as one might expect today from teenagers. We learned some new things from them that we had not heard before. One of the graduates of the class of 1960 donated his autographed yearbook to us. Another brought along printed materials that we intend to digitize as part of the historical record.

After lunch Janet and I returned to campus to spend another hour with our guests. I gathered them together to pray for them just prior to 3:00 pm and then went home. We locked up the library but some of them may have stayed on campus for a while longer.

All through the process, while Mel Walker was in Germany I kept him informed. Afterwards I followed up with emails to Bill Dillon, the leader, and all the others for whom I had email addresses to thank them for coming and to offer future services to them. In summary, I believe it was a successful event that was enjoyed by all who participated.



Back row: Bill Dillon, Jim McCormick, Chuck Morel, Gerry Will, Norm Gauthier, Adam Kretowicz, Pete Berner, Jim Paradis, Marty McDonough; Front Row: Carmelo Mallia, Jim Borer, Amilbia and Bob Mundy, Michael Canavan, John Zammit, Larry Blob.

David C. McClain: 5/23/17