

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Professionally, Annie May Alston Lewis was a librarian and teacher. She attended David Lipscomb College for two years and graduated from Harding College in 1939 with a degree in English. She taught in public schools for a few years and completed a B.S. degree in library science from George Peabody College in 1943.

Dr. George Benson asked her to come to Harding to teach English in 1944. She preferred a position in the library; but because there was no opening, she accepted the invitation to teach English. In 1947 she became head librarian and worked tirelessly (many times 10 hours a day) to improve the quality of the library. A few years later when Harding received its accreditation, the library received the highest praise from the visitation team. During these years in the summers, she worked on and completed an M.A. degree from the University of Chicago in 1952.

Annie May's father died in 1952, and she took a leave of absence from Harding to be with her mother. When the librarian who had taken her place left, Dr. Benson again invited her back to Harding as the librarian, and she served in that capacity from 1956 to 1962.

In 1962 after several invitations from W. B. West, Jr., Annie May agreed to come to Memphis to become the librarian at the Harding University Graduate School of Religion. She had accepted a unique position. She became the first theological librarian in the churches of Christ and was entrusted with the responsibility of building from scratch a quality collection to support a theological graduate program. She attacked this project with the same hard work and determination that characterized her tenure at Searcy. She put in long hours to build the library.

STILL LIVING BY FAITH

She was the first member of the churches of Christ to become a member of the American Theological Library Association, the national organization for theological librarians. She attended the annual meetings and developed relationships with librarians from other theological schools. These contacts were immensely helpful to her in learning what to add to the collection and how to get these materials. At her request several donated books and periodicals to the library.

To become familiar with the subject area, Annie May enrolled in the M.A. program at Harding Graduate School and took courses while working full time as librarian. She completed the program in 1967, becoming one of the early women in the churches of Christ to have a graduate theological degree. In the late 1960s, she developed a course at the Graduate School to help students improve their writing and research skills and to familiarize them with the basic research tools in theology. Because of her work, Harding Graduate School is still one of the few seminaries that offer such a required course.

When Annie May came to Memphis, the Harding Graduate School library contained only about 5,000 volumes and subscribed to only 82 periodicals. When she retired in 1983, it had almost 69,000 volumes and received 582 periodicals. She not only left a good theological collection but a great legacy for succeeding librarians, who would be respected members of and vital participants in the academic community. During her career she also mentored several who became librarians.

Annie May was active in library professional organizations and served in leadership roles in each. During her years in Arkansas she served as president of the Arkansas Library Association. She was a charter member of the Tennessee Theological Library Association, a charter member of the Christian College Librarians, and a member of the Memphis Area Library Council from its earliest days. She was honored several times for her work. She was listed in *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who of American Women*, and *Outstanding Educators of America*. She received the 20th Century Christian Literature Award in 1975. In 1968 she became the first woman to be honored as a distinguished alumna by Harding College, and in 1979 she and Dr. Lewis were joint

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

recipients of Harding University's Distinguished Service Award. She was the only person twice honored as alumna of the year by Harding Graduate School, in 1993 and again posthumously in April 2006. In the latter case, the award was to be given to the alumnus who best exemplified the school's 2006 theme of "holiness." The alumni and administration felt no one better exemplified that theme.

Most people who knew and admired Annie May did not know her as a librarian but as a Christian woman who exemplified the holiness that led to her last earthly award. She was born into a godly family in Henning, Tennessee, on November 26, 1917. Through word and example, her loving parents and siblings instilled in her the importance of family and, more important, the significance of being a part of God's family. Two brothers died before she was born, but she grew up with her brother, Jack, and sister, Margaret. These also preceded her in death, Jack in 1968 and Margaret in 1974. When her mother was no longer able to live alone, she moved into Annie May's one-bedroom apartment, and Annie May lovingly cared for her for eight years until her death in April 1973. She dearly loved Betty Alston, her sister-in-law, and her nephews and nieces, Jackie, Susan, Meg, and Roy, all of whom cherish her memory.

The small Henning congregation nurtured Annie May, and she was privileged to hear such gifted preachers as Dr. L. C. Sears, Dr. Jack P. Lewis, James A. Harding, and L. K. Harding teach God's Word. At the age of 12, she was baptized by L. K. Harding.

During her student days at Harding, she was influenced by the sacrificial service of the teachers and their wives and their faith in God's providential care. There she witnessed a simple lifestyle that she embraced all her life. It was also here that she became convinced that "everyone ought to hear about Jesus at least once." It was this conviction that motivated her to be involved in the training and encouragement of preachers and missionaries.

On November 23, 1978, just three days before her sixty-first birthday, Annie May married Dr. Jack P. Lewis, long-time friend and fellow professor at the Harding Graduate School of Religion.

They shared a love for the church, a love for the Bible, a love for teaching, a commitment to a simple lifestyle, and a spirit of generosity for God's work. Both taught Bible classes at the Church of Christ at White Station for many years and both served on its missions committee. She encouraged Dr. Lewis in his research and writing, proofread what he wrote, and frequently traveled with him when he lectured. She particularly enjoyed the annual Society of Biblical Literature meetings where she could visit with former Harding Graduate School students.

Annie May encouraged anyone she felt needed it, whether college president, dean, fellow Christian, preacher, missionary, or student. For many years she mailed a regular newsletter to missionaries and sent notes, phoned, or spoke a word of encouragement to hundreds. Her hospitality knew no limits; it included good food and fellowship offered to every conceivable category of people, especially missionaries and foreign students from Harding Graduate School. As one lady observed, "Annie May had a great capacity to love," and that love knew no social, ethnic, racial, or educational bounds. After her retirement she used her additional time to visit nursing homes and to become involved in the Each One Teach One literacy program.

Annie May taught a ladies' Bible class at the Church of Christ at White Station for over 30 years. For a few years, she taught on Tuesday morning, Sunday morning, and Wednesday night. When the congregation began a bus program to bring in children for Sunday Bible school, she began a class for the mothers of the children who came. All of these ladies were eventually baptized, and a few still attend regularly. This class soon became a favorite of other ladies, and she continued to teach as long as her health permitted. Through her teaching and mentoring, she blessed their lives and developed a multitude of daughters of faith.

Stewardship and frugality were consistent traits in Annie May's life. She never hesitated to ask for funds for the library or for other worthy causes, but she never asked for anything for herself. She lived very simply and never sought the finer things of life but sent her money to people and institutions she felt needed it. Her idea of a fancy meal out was a hamburger and maybe some pistachio almond ice cream.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Prayer was a significant and regular part of Annie May's daily devotional life, and she believed strongly in its efficacy. She prayed faithfully for a host of people daily and enlisted others to pray for those she was especially concerned about.

Annie May loved the Bible and felt it should be the center of any Sunday school class. A lady who sat with her at the nursing home overheard her say, "Books, books everywhere, but there's really only one book." She was a devoted Bible student and instilled in others a love for it and a desire to study it. In her last three months in the hospital, she frequently asked the ladies who sat with her to read from the Bible, particularly the Psalms, many of which she had committed to memory. Her knowledge of and love for the Bible are very apparent in the lessons in this book.

On March 9, 2006, Annie May went to receive the award she longed for and wrote of in the last selection in this collection. Truly she embodied the statement she once made in an interview, "Where there's a need, try to fill it because you belong to the Lord."

Don L. Meredith, Head Librarian
Harding University Graduate School of Religion
Memphis, TN