

Aaron Henry Rapking, Sr.



Aaron H. Rapking was not a West Virginian by birth, but became a West Virginian in heart. Born in Ohio, he spent his boyhood on a small farm. His father died when he was seven years old and he was soon trying to do a man's work. As a teenager, he spent several months managing an aunt's farm, along with helping on the family farm. The money he earned enabled him to start college. Through work and school and during the summer months he continued his education. He graduated from Baldwin-Wallace College and from Garrett Biblical Institute. He attended Oberlin College and West Virginia University. He received an honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree from Salem College.

During all of his professional years, Dr. Rapking's efforts were directed to bettering conditions for the farm family and rural life. After being a preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church from 1912-19 in Illinois and Ohio, he came to West Virginia Wesleyan College as a professor in the Department of Rural Leadership. Here he trained young men to serve in rural churches.

In 1920, he began his work with the West Virginia University Extension Service as Rural Sociologist, as well as being minister in the West Virginia Methodist Conference of which he was a member from 1919 until his death. From 1920 until 1938, Dr. Rapking worked among the people of West Virginia, helping to organize them into communities and to work together for the betterment of their home life, church, schools, and community. He stressed the need for up-to-date equipment on the farm and in the home. He was interested in young people and in providing recreation for them and their parents within the community.

Although not a community scoring system has been devised by Dr. Nat T. Frame, then Director of the Extension Service, Dr. Rapking started the first Country Life Conferences which were held once a year in the difficult communities of the state. The community was scored and Dr. Rapking preached. The scoring helped the people to see the improvements they had made during the year. Through the enthusiasm generated, many communities were organized and community buildings constructed.

In 1926, Dr. Rapking was a representative from West Virginia to the first International Country Life Conference. He wrote weekly messages for forty years titles "Religion and Life" and later, "Religion and Life in the Countryside." These messages were used in the Clarksburg newspapers as well as approximately 75 newspapers throughout the state.

During World War II, Dr. Rapking worked throughout the United States in the Town and Country work of the Methodist Church. In 1945, he was moved to a small Methodist junior college south of Knoxville, Tenn. He was in charge of training student ministers and worked with communities throughout Tennessee as much as he had done in West Virginia. In 1956, he was named "Rural Minister of the Year" by the PROGRESSIVE FARMER magazine. Later, the chapel of a new church built on the campus of Hiwassee College was named the "Rapking Chapel."

After retiring, Dr. Rapking returned to his home in Good Hope, Harrison County, where he recognized the community and kept an active program going for a number of years.

Dedicated to his work, Dr. Rapking's philosophy of life affected many families throughout the United States. He tried to help people see the beauty of nature, to help them to overcome their problems.