

Oberlin News-Tribune

August 4, 2011

Milton Yinger

Milton Yinger, formerly of Oberlin, died Thursday, July 28, 2011. He was 95

Born in Quincy, Mich., in 1916, his parents, George and Emma Bancroft Yinger, were both Methodist ministers. He grew up with five brothers and two sisters. Under the direction of his father, he and various combinations of his siblings sang in hundreds of concerts as the Yinger Singers.

He went to DePauw University, where he studied sociology and continued to sing with his siblings. As a sprinter on the DePauw track team, he once raced against Jesse Owens.

The rest of his education consisted of a master's degree from Louisiana State University and a doctorate from the University of Wisconsin.

While he was a student at Wisconsin, he met his future bride, Winnie McHenry. They were married in 1941 and remained devoted to each other for 61 years, until she died in 2002.

After beginning his professorial career at Ohio Wesleyan University, he moved to Oberlin College in 1947 and remained there until retiring in 1987.

In addition to being a dedicated professor of sociology and anthropology, he was a prolific author, with 13 books and dozens of articles in professional journals to his credit. His textbook, co-authored with George E. Simpson, "Racial and Cultural Minorities," went through five editions and won the 1959 Anisfield-Wolf award for the best scholarly work on race relations. (He and his co-author shared this award with another author, Martin Luther King Jr.)

Another of his books, "The Scientific Study of Religion," is widely cited as one of the leading works in the field. An article of his that appeared in the *American Sociological Review* in 1960 originated the concept of a "contraculture," which he defined as a group whose values contain "as a primary element, a theme of conflict with the values of the total society." With the stylistic switch to "counterculture," which uses an alternative form of the same Latin prefix, his concept and term became widely known during the next decade.

His own work on this topic culminated with the 1982 publication of his book, "Countercultures: The Promise and Peril of a World Turned Upside Down," which one reviewer called a book "of immense range, erudition, and sophistication." He published another widely cited book, "Ethnicity: Source of Strength? Source of Conflict?" in 1994.

In recognition of his distinguished contributions to sociology, he was elected to serve as president of the American Sociological Association in 1976-77. He also received honorary degrees from DePauw and Syracuse University and was a Guggenheim Fellow, a Fellow of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and a Fellow of Clare Hall at Cambridge University in England.

Dr. Yinger is survived by his daughters Susan Johnson of Oberlin, and Nancy Yinger of Oakton, Va.; son, John Yinger of Fayetteville, N.Y.; and five grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Memorial contributions may be sent to Oberlin College, 50 W. Lorain St., Oberlin, 44074.