“The “Oberlin Band” in Shanxi, 1881-1900”

a lecture by

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2:00 pm
Jennings Hall, Room 060
(1735 Neil Avenue)

Bio
Carl W. Jacobson joined Oberlin Shansi in 1976 and served as Executive Director from 1981 to 2012. He received his A.M. in East Asian Regional Studies from Harvard University in 1971 and his Ph.D. in Chinese History from the University of Michigan in 1993. In addition to his Shansi duties he is an adjunct member of the Oberlin College history department and has taught classical and modern Chinese history. He has resided in Hong Kong and Taiwan for research and teaching, has traveled extensively in Asia, and has conducted several Oberlin Alumni and Shansi tours of China including of Tibet and the Silk Road. His research interests include Chinese secret societies and modern Chinese intellectual history.

The paper introduces the background and development of the “Oberlin Band,” a group of missionaries with Oberlin connections that served and died in China. Beginning in 1881, the group came under auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and journeyed to Shanxi Province. It traces their activities in the province including street corner evangelism, medical work, opium refuges, education, and work with women. In the summer of 1900 all were killed in the course of the Boxer Uprising. The paper takes a look at some of the missionary self-conceptions as revealed in their letters and diaries. Although their behavior, especially in their own eyes, might be considered “less offensive” than that of some other foreigners living in China, it is argued that their very being foreign, and representative of their very different kind, identified them as the subjects of attack. Their difference squarely identified them with the foreign powers that had been vexing the Chinese Empire for more than seventy years.

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