



Free Methodist Historical Society

Newsletter

FALL / WINTER 2000 — Volume 1, No. 2

The Living Legacy of L.R. Marston

Bishop Leslie Ray Marston was born in a log house in Michigan, the son of a preacher who ministered in both Wesleyan and Free Methodist churches. He never cut away from his roots.

Converted as a youth, at first Marston had no clear call to the church's ministry. Yet he chose the way of service, becoming a child psychologist with a doctorate from the University of Iowa. Before age 30 he was appointed executive secretary of the National Research Council's Committee on Child Development.

The church soon called Marston into its ministry. The first summons came from his alma mater, Greenville College. His sense of Christian service led him to accept, though this meant a radical career change. He was just 33 years old when he became president of Greenville. For the rest of his life he served his church as he served his Lord.

Dr. Marston never pastored a congregation. But when friends urged him to accept ordination while still president of Greenville, he took the summons as

God's guidance and was ordained. God was preparing this scientist-educator for the bishopric, to which he was elected in 1935.

Marston's leadership reached far beyond his own church. He served on the executive committee of the World Methodist Council and was a founder of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). He was one of the first NAE presidents, serving 1944-1946.

Bishop Paul Ellis said of Marston, "His gifts were many and awesome. He was an administrator, a teacher, a writer, a speaker and a counselor. In all he excelled. He led in the founding vision of the Free Methodist World

Fellowship. In sum, his leadership reached everywhere Free Methodism has established churches."

Bishop Marston authored the widely-admired centennial history of the Free Methodist Church, *From Age to Age, A Living Witness*. His own life was indeed "a living witness."

(Adapted from Bishop Paul Ellis' Introduction to *Marston's biography*, Like a Tree Planted [1985].)



Director Cathy Fortner in the entrance to the center named for Bishop Marston

Published by the
**Marston Memorial
Historical Center**

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Membership Certificates Commemorate FM Bishops

E.P. Hart, Wilson T. Hogue, and William Pearce are among early Free Methodist bishops being commemorated in new membership certificates for the Free Methodist Historical Society. Each certificate, attractively printed and suitable for framing, bears a facsimile of the official seal of one of the bishops from the church's history.

The first certificate, for the year 2001, will be imprinted with a copy of B.T. Roberts' seal. Other bishops featured will be George Coleman, B.R. Jones, W.A. Sellow, David Warner, A.D. Zahniser and Leslie Marston.



The 2001 membership certificate will be sent to all those who become Historical Society members between now and December, 2001. In addition, all members receive the society's *Newsletter*. Membership begins at the \$20 Sustaining Member level.

People interested in FM history may support the work of the Historical Center and the society through memberships or through the Free Methodist Foundation (800-325-8975), either by deferred giving or by direct gifts to the Historical Center's endowment.

The Mission of the Free Methodist Historical Society is to preserve Free Methodist heritage and transmit it faithfully to each generation in order to assist the Free Methodist Church in fulfilling its mission.



Helen Isabel Root:

by David Bundy

Ever the Missionary

For more than two generations of Free Methodists, Helen Isabel Root (13 April 1873 – 3 Nov. 1945) was a legend and a saint. Larger than life she traveled the nation, in every sort of conveyance, speaking in churches large and small about the passions of her heart: missions and the work of the Free Methodist Women's Missionary Society (WMS) and the Young People's Missionary Society (YPMS).

For years, every month her handiwork, *Missionary Tidings*, which Root edited from 1931 to 1943, entered most Free Methodist homes. Yet despite this status and virtual omnipresence, she is either absent from the historiography of Free Methodist missions or mentioned only in passing. She is also not to be found in the general histories of American mission. Who, then, was this woman whose biographer described her as a "great Christian, educator, preacher, missionary and author"?

"The work on the Tidings is a constant spiritual tonic. To know almost at firsthand the mighty workings of God and to feel the pull of opening opportunities on every field, to share in setting these things before the church so that prayer and means and volunteers may be forthcoming to meet the needs—all this impels the heart to prayer and solid faith."

(Missionary Tidings 43:7 [1939], 202)

From Presbyterian to Unitarian to Congregationalist Missionary

Helen Root had an intellectual formation quite different from the average missionary (and most women, and men) of the early twentieth century. A farmer's daughter, she could read Latin fluently before entering university. She became a Christian in a Presbyterian context and joined that church as a youth. Root finished high school at Port Byron, New York, at age sixteen and took the examination to become a teacher. Three years later she enrolled at Cornell University, declared herself agnostic and began attending a Unitarian Church. This became her church home, and its skeptical piety and rigorous scholarly analysis formed her intellectual identity.

Then, one Sunday, partly as a game to ascertain whether an avowed Christian could be intellectually coherent, she went to a lecture by John R. Mott. Impressed, she requested an interview. That meeting turned her world upside down. She made a commitment to be a Christian and decided to become a missionary. Becoming active in the YWCA, she attended a Summer Bible Course at Northfield, Mass., where she came to know

D.L. Moody. Root then became a missionary candidate in search of a mission.

The search led her to Union Missionary Training Institute. She applied and was accepted by the Congregationalist American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Mission (ABCFM) and appointed to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). She taught in a girls' school (1899-1907) and learned to speak and write Tamil. It is clear she was quite happy in the ABCFM, but she was seeking a more fulfilling spiritual life.

Back home on furlough, Helen met Charlotte T. Bolles, a Free Methodist. Bolles introduced her to the experience of personal holiness and to Free Methodism. Ever the missionary, Helen started a Free Methodist Sunday School at Port Byron and began her pastoral service at the FM Church in Corinth, New York. For about a decade she served as an unordained Free Methodist pastor. Then her call to foreign missions sought expression in her new church.

From Free Methodist Missionary in India to Editor of *Missionary Tidings*

In 1917 Root was appointed to India as a Free Methodist missionary. She served there

primarily as a teacher (which required her to learn the Marathi and Telegu languages). Health concerns forced her to return (1922) to the USA. In India, she was part of a missionary force composed primarily of women. From 1885 to 1932, 38 FM missionaries ministered in India. Eleven of those were men; 27 were women. This experience of women's space for ministry in India had a significant impact on her later mission and values.

The WMS, which elected Root "traveling secretary" in 1923, affirmed these values. Root became a missions promoter. She and her Ford automobile, "Fidelia," visited nearly every Free Methodist congregation, driving more than 75,000 miles—before there were freeways and many paved roads. Root spoke of her experiences, organized local WMS groups, and inspired congregations to support missions. In 1931, the WMS appointed her General Corresponding Secretary and Literature Agent, and she became editor of *Missionary Tidings*. She was ordained deacon by the Susquehanna Conference in 1927 and transferred to the Illinois Conference in 1934.

Helen's editorial work was more than a desk job in Chicago or Winona Lake. She traveled extensively, supporting the cause of foreign and domestic mission. In addition to her WMS work, she worked at Olive Branch Mission in Chicago and pastored the Aurora (Illinois) Free Methodist Church.

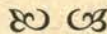
Prolific Author in the Cause of Mission

Helen Root began writing in Ceylon while appointed by the ABCFM. Her first published writing (identified to this point) was a history of that mission. Typically she was modest about her role in the work. But her history remains a useful record of that missionary endeavor.

Writing was part of her portfolio as editor of the *Missionary Tidings*. Through the years she contributed many articles and editorials. These testify to her independent and analytical mind. She is one of the great editorial writers among Free Methodists. Root also wrote to support the missionary program of the church. For example, she contributed numerous chapters to a study book about Free Methodist missions. In these narratives the treatment of gender issues and the recognition of the contribution of women was a model historiographical effort.

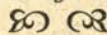
Another book provided a popular history of FM missions in Africa. Later came a book on Clara Leffingwell, founder of the Free Methodist mission in China. A third, written with FM missionary to Japan Ruth Mylander, reassured concerned Americans

that the investment of mission effort in Japan was not wasted, no matter what the international situation. An observation tendered in the introduction to the Leffingwell biography is applicable to her entire literary oeuvre: "This is but an effort to show the connection between one surrendered life and God's great purposes for a life and a land and a church" (*A Corn of Wheat*, 8).



It has been a great privilege to have been in touch with world movements as well as church movements which have called for reserves of faith and endurance on the part of our great missionaries at home and abroad. We come . . . more than ever assured that God lives and His work goes forward.

(*Missionary Tidings* 43:6 [1939], 170)



Legacy of a Peripatetic Leader

After the General Conference of 1939, Root was forced to rest from exhaustion. She reported that she was "still on the job" and that she had been able to keep up with the essential work from bed, having ascertained that "There is nothing wrong with my brain, happily, and I have discovered that it works just as well horizontally as perpendicularly" (*Missionary Tidings* 43:10 [1939], 302). Vintage Root!

In 1943 Helen retired, but continued to travel and preach throughout the USA until her death in 1945. Tributes published in *Missionary Tidings* and *Light and Life* reflected

on Root's impact upon the lives of her family, staff and the larger church. Perhaps more than any other person of her generation, and perhaps more than any other individual Free Methodist ever, Root took the cause of Free Methodist missions to the hearts and minds of men, women and children across the church. No "respector of persons," and endowed with a strong egalitarian sense of social justice, she enlisted the poor as well as the more wealthy in a common cause. She, was, after all, ever the missionary.

Bibliographic Note: On Free Methodist Missions for this period, see Carrie Turrell Burritt, *The Story of Fifty Years* (Winona Lake, n.d.); Byron S. Lamson's *Lights in the World* (Winona Lake, 1951), *To Catch the Tide* (Winona Lake, 1962), and *Venture* (Winona

Lake, 1960); L.R. Marston, *From Age to Age A Living Witness* (Winona Lake, 1960). There is an interesting but undocumented biography of Root: Ruth M. Tapper, *The Full Years: The Life Story of Helen I. Root* (Winona Lake, 1948). Books by Root include: *A Century in Ceylon* (Boston, 1916); *Our Africa Work: A Brief History of the Free Methodist Mission in Africa* (Winona Lake, 1928); "*A Corn of Wheat:*" *The Life Story of Clara Leffingwell* (Winona Lake, 1943); and, with Ruth Mylander, *Japan Investment* (Winona Lake, 1944). Other information is taken from *Missionary Tidings* and *The Free Methodist*.

David Bundy is librarian and professor of church history at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis.

News

O t t e s

- Thanks to Bob Haslam for editing the first number of the Newsletter!
- The Marston Historical Center's holdings include some of the rarest publications of early Methodism, as well as Free Methodism. These include a 1743 edition of Wesley's *Hymns and Sacred Poems* and a number of John Wesley's pamphlets.
- Elias Bowen, an older colleague of B.T. Roberts in the (Methodist) Genesee Conference before the formation of Free Methodism, was sympathetic with Roberts' concerns. He was a frequent contributor to the *Northern Christian Advocate*, the Methodist weekly published in Auburn, NY. Bowen is particularly important for Free Methodists, as he joined the new denomination in 1869

and shortly before his death in 1871 published his *History of the Origin of the Free Methodist Church*.

Students of FM history will be pleased to learn that 172 letters and other documents pertaining to Bowen are located in the Bridewell Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX (Phone 214-768-3483). The collection is mostly letters written to Bowen from Methodists such as George Lane (Ellen Roberts' uncle), Phoebe Palmer, and others, according to a report in the January, 2000, *Northeastern United Methodist Historical Bulletin*.

- In COMING ISSUES of the Newsletter: "Seeker Sensitive" — What was B.T. Roberts' View? Also: The historical uniqueness of the FM World Fellowship, by Gerald Bates.

Book Review

Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr., by Ron Chernow. Random House, 1998. 774 pages. ISBN: 0-679-43808-4

The Daily Roberts, compiled and edited by Donald E. Demaray. Light and Life Press, 1996. 341 pages. ISBN: 0-89367-206-8

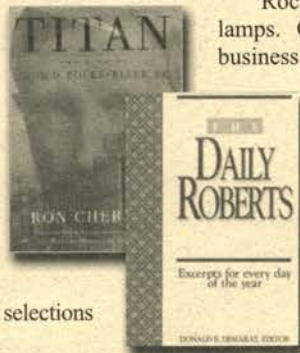
These very different books shed light on Free Methodist history and identity in contrasting ways.

The Daily Roberts is a collection of excerpts from B.T. Roberts' writings for each day of the year. Demaray chooses rather broadly from *The Earnest Christian*, *The Free Methodist*, Roberts' own books, and unpublished materials. Occasionally he includes selections from other authors whom Roberts quoted.

The result is a delightful reader that serves doubly as a devotional aid and an introduction to Roberts. Demaray has updated the language a bit, making the book more accessible to today's readers. Though this limits the book's usefulness for scholars, sources of the selections are given, enabling further research.

Ron Chernow's *Titan* is a full-blown biography of John D. Rockefeller, Sr., of Standard Oil fame. Rockefeller was a contemporary of Roberts. Though he lived until 1937, he was born in 1839, just 16 years after Roberts' birth. Since Rockefeller's roots were in New York State, his life illuminates the social, religious, and economic context from which Free Methodism arose.

The most colorful character in *Titan* is William Avery Rockefeller, John's father. A flamboyant character (in contrast to his son), William Rockefeller would disappear for months at a time. Chernow presents convincing evidence that he was a bigamist and a "man of multiple disguises."



There could be a connection between William Rockefeller and B.T. Roberts. One of the names William used in the 1850s was Rockafellow. Roberts, pastoring at Brockport in 1854, mentions calling on a Sister Rockafellows. A link? Conceivably.

John D. Rockefeller, Sr., worked all his life to keep his father's shady past secret. He himself was an upstanding Baptist who for years taught Sunday School at his home church in Cleveland, OH.

Rockefeller made his initial fortune from kerosene for lamps. Gasoline came later. He was sometimes ruthless in business and did his best to stamp out competition, yet in later life he sought to be a responsible philanthropist. His conundrum, as the world's first billionaire, was how to give away money so that it would be a blessing, not a curse.

Financial stewardship was a subject B.T. Roberts also pondered. See his *First Lessons on Money* (1886). Roberts had a passion both for "preaching the Gospel to the poor" and for using wealth responsibly. Demaray includes some quotes from *First Lessons*. "Systematic benevolence aids one in becoming systematic in business." "Save something regularly from your earnings." "Avoid all mere speculations; have nothing to do with stock gambling and risky dealings." But he advised buying real estate "if the income from it will pay interest and taxes, because it will probably rise in value."

Roberts and Rockefeller provide interesting contrasts in character. Like Rockefeller, Roberts was careful and generally successful in business. But Roberts made laying up treasure in heaven his primary goal — and in this, his legacy is richer.

- Howard A. Snyder

Free Methodist Historical Society Announces

New Collectible Series of Membership Certificates

Bishops' Seals

The new certificates will be frameable on vellum paper. Dr. Howard Snyder, Chairman of the Historical Society states: "The distribution of these facsimiles of the bishops' seals is an excellent way to recognize their legacy of service to the Free Methodist Church. I trust Free Methodists will treasure these significant bits of our history."

Sustaining member- \$20 per year
Heritage member - \$50 per year
Chapter member (Institutional) - \$100 per year
Marston Fellow—a one-time gift to the endowment of \$500

All gifts are tax deductible. Receipts will be issued with the membership certificates.

Society members receive periodic newsletters on the activities of the Free Methodist Historical Society, news of additions to the historical collection, information, articles on other related Free Methodist collections and instructions on how to identify suitable items for preservation.

Those desiring to become members may send their check to:
Marston Historical Center, Box 535002, Indianapolis IN 47253-5002

- 2001— Benjamin T. Roberts (1860-1893)
- 2002— E. P. Hart (1874-1908)
- 2003— George W. Coleman (1886-1903)
- 2004— B. R. Jones (1894-1919)
- 2005— W. A. Sellow (1898-1929)
- 2006— Wilson T. Hogue (1893-1894 & 1903— 1919)
- 2007— William Pearce (1908-1947)
- 2008— D. S. Warner (1919-1927)
- 2009— Arthur D. Zahniser (1927-1935)
- 2010— Leslie R. Marston (1935-1964)