



Free Methodist Historical Society

Newsletter

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B. T. Roberts' Supporting Cast

Rev. Loren Stiles, Jr. (1820-1863)

Second in a series about those who were closest to Roberts in the founding era of the Free Methodist Church.

Selected by members of the (Methodist) Genesee Conference "Regency" as a Presiding Elder in 1855, Loren Stiles – young, elegant, well-educated and a gifted orator – would, it was thought, quell "fanaticism" and bring respectability to his district. The area had fallen under the influence of the Bergen Camp Meeting, holiness preaching, and remarkable manifestations of saving power. Certainly Stiles would be capable of the fine balancing act needed to bring order and restraint.

Instead of finding "coarse fanaticism," however, Stiles found spiritual reality and power that he in his education and refinement did not possess. He knew instinctively this was of God, and he sought and found the work of holiness. His energies were then directed to the preaching of holiness—to the dismay of those who had placed him in leadership.

As a result, Stiles was transferred to the Cincinnati Conference in 1856. But the following year he returned—only to be expelled from the conference in 1859. In 1858 he served as counsel for B. T. Roberts when Roberts was tried and expelled by the Genesee Conference.

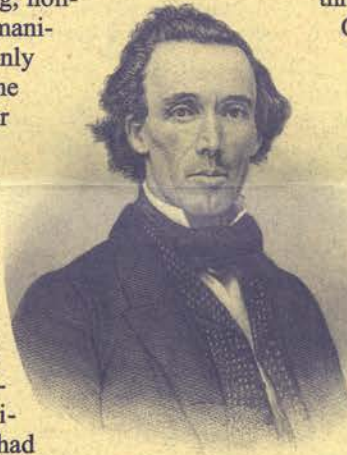
Stiles did not appeal his conviction. Instead, returning to Albion, New York, he established an independent "Congregational Free Methodist Church." After the Pekin Convention in 1860 and the birth of

the Free Methodist denomination, Stiles and his church joined the newly formed Free Methodists. The man that Roberts described as "Amiable in his disposition, pleasing in his manners, and a thorough gentleman in all his bearing," worked side by side with Roberts, if not always hand in hand, over the next three years until his death. At the Pekin Convention when the article of religion on entire sanctification was being debated, Stiles supported a gradualistic interpretation of process along with crisis. The article adopted with Roberts' support spoke of sanctification as "wrought instantaneously."

Stiles' opposition to women preachers also put him on the opposite side of an issue with Roberts. In agreement with Roberts, however, he supported establishing a denominational school and brought a resolution to that end to the (FM) Genesee Conference in 1861.

Stiles died on May 7, 1863, only 42 years old. Half a century later, in 1910, his credentials were restored by the (Methodist) Genesee Conference, along with those of B. T. Roberts.

— Charles Canon, *Roberts Wesleyan College*



(For more information on Stiles see Roberts, *Why Another Sect* [1879]; W. T. Hogue, *A History of the Free Methodist Church*, Vol. 1 [1915]; L. R. Marston, *From Age to Age a Living Witness* [1960]; and Elias Bowen, *History of the Origin of the Free Methodist Church* [1871], 334-44.)

Calling All Conference Historians

Conference historians are *key links* in the expanding network to preserve and make useable the rich history of the Free Methodist Church. The Marston Memorial Historical Center would like to help build this network.

If you are a historian, we want to hear from you. Perhaps you have news items (a centennial

celebration?) or important documents or photos we should know about. Perhaps you'd like to write an article for the *Newsletter*, or send a description of your conference's historical collection.

If there is sufficient interest, we will plan a one-day seminar for historians. Let us hear from you!

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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.

The Free Methodist World

— A Timely Emergence of Globalism

Understanding Free Methodism's global reach today and how it functions requires a quick look at history. There we discover the origins of key configurations and the values that embody the worldwide communion today in over sixty countries.

For a short course in Free Methodist philosophy of churchmanship, take a quick look at the current distribution of bishops around the globe. Here you see most vividly the eagerness to share leadership which has characterized the denomination. Today, the church of 520,000 worldwide is led by a corps of 15 bishops. Of the 15, only five are North American (one Canadian and four American). The rest are nationals in most sectors of the world, giving the following overall breakdown: Africa, 7; U.S., 4; Asia, 2; Latin America, 1; and Canada, 1.

An important story lies behind these facts. Much of it concerns the phenomenon called the World Fellowship of Free Methodist Churches, born in the early 1960s.

Birth of the World Fellowship

The period 1958 to 1964 saw a great surge of creative thinking and purposeful activity in the leadership of the Free Methodist Church. Key attempts were made to assess and respond to the implications brought about by the success of the denomination's foreign missions effort. This concern was given urgency by increasing racial sensitivity at home in North America and the rise of national independence in many of the nations of the world. In October 1958 the Board of Administration of the

North American church was charged by the Commission on Missions with the task of providing a framework of consultations with overseas Free Methodist leaders. The language of the charge is eloquent and far reaching in meaning:

[I]t has become clear to the Commission on Missions that the Free Methodist Church of North America is approaching the time when it must think in terms of a world church of related national churches, and plan with representatives of national Free Methodist groups looking toward the organization of largely autonomous national churches within the various countries now controlled in large measure by mission extensions of the home church.

The mandate included "creating a new type of world church relationship" and a "comprehensive plan for the structure of world Free Methodism."

According to then General Missionary Secretary Byron Lamson, the motivations for these actions were three:

1. Nationalism, 2. Maturation of mission churches and leadership, and 3. The challenge of the unevangelized areas of the world—the mobilization of the worldwide forces of the church for evangelization and service.

The extraordinary character of this kind of thinking must be seen against the backdrop of the missiological issues of the day. Most missions organizations at the time were preoccupied with mission/church and missionary/national relationships. Few were thinking globally in such sweeping terms. A

number of international denominations are still to this day largely run from America—with all the attendant problems that brings.

In the Free Methodist Church, early leaders in this forward-looking movement were such men as Lamson, Bishop Leslie Marston, missionary Harold Ryckman, and Mr. Hugh White, a leading layman on the Commission on Missions. They were breaking new ground—debating the merits of a "world church" versus a consortium of general conferences and other elements of world Free Methodism.

Cooperation, Not Centralization

Eventually these leaders rejected a centralized model and opted for a world fellowship held together by a constitution and a mission of coordination, relationships, and evangelistic efforts. The building blocks would be annual and general conferences, thus utilizing the historic structures of the church and protecting local autonomy.

As steps toward the world organization, a series of regional consultations were held: Japan, April 1960; Africa, September 1961; and Latin America, January 1962. It was felt there was no substitute for face-to-face contact. Much of the reporting of the period contains hyperbole of language, a great sense of history in the making. V. B. Samudre of India, likening what was going on to Pentecost, asked the question, "Will all the Free Methodists around the world find themselves in one room?" Karim Mina of Egypt prayed, "O God, you see us. Give us a word for our situation." Often there were expressions that this was a "first step" for which there were no precedents.

Participants sensed the excitement of something totally new being born. Frank Kline, missionary from India, spoke of members' attendance as "one of the highest privileges of their lives." There were calls for 100,000 Free Methodists (the total world membership) to join, with suffering if necessary, for the more speedy evangelization of the world.

After lively debate, the 1960 General Conference authorized the formation of a World Fellowship of Free Methodist churches. The General Conference reporter commented at the time, "Free Methodists have made history today; repudiating Western supremacy, giving mature mission fields



World Fellowship delegates with Leslie Marston at the 1974 General Conference in Winona Lake.

Fellowship

by Gerald E. Bates

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the right to petition for membership in a world organization and the privilege of managing their own internal affairs."

Two general conferences with their own bishops were created almost immediately, in Egypt and Japan. Other mature annual conferences were urged to move to general conference status. The fruit of this urging is the panoply of national bishops scattered around the world today, as noted above.

Forty Years of History

For nearly forty years the World Fellowship served as the one global agency for world Free Methodism. Its aims were coordination, fellowship, joint planning, and co-operative action. Area fellowships were organized under its sponsorship for regional coordination. There are now six of these — two in Africa, two in Latin America, one in the Pacific Rim, and one in the North Atlantic region. The International Scholarship Fund was created to assist at the graduate level in the production of leaders.

Over these four decades the fellowship structure has averted many of the tensions and even divisions experienced by other denominations and agencies in the international arena. The face-to-face emphasis, the system of communication, the dignity conferred by representation and a forum, have all served Free Methodism well. The multiplication of mission, the geographic extension of the church into new countries, the membership growth by a multiple of more than five — all these bear witness to the wisdom of the far-sighted planners of the 1960s.

In 1999 the World Fellowship was transmuted into the Free Methodist World Conference with the same functions, along with added responsibility for monitoring conformity to the core constitution which is identical in every part of the church. Apart from the elements of the core constitution (doctrine and certain historical elements of organizational distinctives), churches in different areas have freedom to contextualize and become "all-terrain vehicles" in the cultures of the world. Wherever it exists in the world, the Free Methodist Church is recognizable as to identity and relevant as to context.

In sum, the World Fellowship as a phenomenon, in impulse and implementation, may be the single most fruitful innovation in the history of the Free Methodist Church. The growth and dynamism of the church



Rev. Aaron Ruhumuriza receiving communion from a Dominican delegate during the 1974 World Fellowship meeting in Winona Lake.

around the world today seems to support this conclusion. The World Fellowship was, indeed, a "timely emergence of genius."

Bibliographic Note: Further details on the formation of the World Fellowship can be found in the following sources: *The Free Methodist* (Oct. 29, 1957; Nov. 24, 1959; July 5, 1960; Mar. 20, 1962), the books *Venture! The Frontiers of Free Methodism* (Light and Life Press, 1960) and *To Catch the Tide* (General Missionary Board, 1963), both by Dr. Byron S. Lamson, and the Free Methodist Archives at the Marston Memorial Historical Center.



Bishop Emeritus and former Free Methodist missionary Gerald Bates (left), pictured here at a World Fellowship meeting in 1985 with Aaron Ruhumuriza and Henry Church, served as president of the Free Methodist World Fellowship from 1989 to 1995. He writes, "I can remember sitting under a tree at Nundu station in Congo with Harold Ryckman when he was working on the first draft of the World Fellowship constitution in 1962." Bishop Bates is a member of the Committee on Free Methodist History and Archives.

News notes

- REDFIELD ONLINE — J. G. Terrill's *Life of Rev. John Wesley Redfield* is now available online at the Christian Classics Ethereal Library at Calvin College (www.ccel.org). Chapters can be read, printed, or downloaded. Thanks to Prof. Joe Culumber of Greenville College for this information.
- Rev. Donna Saylor of FIRST CHURCH IN INDIANAPOLIS has brought two separate groups of young people to the Historical Center for visits as part of their junior membership program. "I just don't

have the photographs of the former bishops, etc., to show the kids that you have here," she said.

LETTERS:

We just received the Fall issue of the Newsletter. We enjoy reading each issue. — Rev. & Mrs. Charles Howard Canon, Jr. (Gerry, NY)

We're happy to see the progress at the Historical Center. . . . We feel you are doing an important job. We owe much to those who have gone on before us. — Bob and Ardath Marston (Spring Arbor, MI)

Book Review

Carry A. Nation: Retelling the Life, by Fran Grace (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001). 374 pp. ISBN: 0-253-33846-8.

This well researched, sprightly biography of temperance activist Carry Nation includes a delicious quote about Free Methodists. Mrs. Nation wrote, "The Free Methodists, although few in number, and considered a church of but small influence, have been a great power in reform. They were the abolitionists of negro slavery to a man, and now they are the abolitionists of the liquor curse to a man. They were also my friends in this smashing."

The quotation comes from Carry Nation's autobiography, *The Use and Need of the Life of Carry A. Nation*. Mrs. Nation was referring to the help of a FM official in closing illegal saloons in south-central Kansas in 1900, after she had "smashed" several drinking establishments in the town of Kiowa using brickbats, cue sticks, billiard balls, and whatever else came to hand. Fran Grace writes, "Within three months, Nation and her supporters had successfully forced the closure of all saloons in the county – thanks in part to a Free Methodist justice of the peace, Moses Wright."

Carry Nation (1846-1911) became one of the best known and most controversial Prohibitionists and temperance organizers in America. She believed in direct action against illegal saloons, sometimes attacking them with her hatchet. Her method of crusading, she said, was "hatchetation." She was active in the Woman's Chris-

tian Temperance Union in the 1890s, though Grace says the WCTU "no longer claims her as their own (if they ever did)."

Like Carry Nation, Fran Grace was raised in the Disciples of Christ tradition. The author writes, "As a former member of the church tradition of which [Nation] was a part, I have considerable sympathy for both the compelling and constraining dimensions of her experience of it." She adds that as "a feminist historian" she strongly believes "that women's voices need to be recovered and their stories told." The author does a fine job of rescuing the colorful Mrs. Nation from both negative and positive stereotypes.

For Free Methodists, the connections to our own tradition are intriguing. In 1891, Free Methodist women in Medicine Lodge, Kansas, led Carry into a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit. Concerning FM influence, Grace notes: "Founder B. T. Roberts unceasingly criticized the prosperity theology common in the Gilded Age. His alternative 'liberation' theology provided Nation with the connection between asceticism and reform." Grace notes that at her death, Mrs. Nation left part of her estate to the Free Methodist Church of Oklahoma.

In later years, Carry Nation carried her temperance message to the Chautauqua circuit and the vaudeville stage. Though often lampooned in the press, she had a clear sense of vocation and was committed to doing God's will as she understood it.

Grace's book is a helpful contribution to a nuanced understanding of Carry Nation and of her times and the issues she faced.

— Howard A. Snyder, *Asbury Theological Seminary*



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