



B.T. Roberts
(1823-93)

Free Methodist Historical Society

Newsletter

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150-Year-Old Roberts Portraits Recovered

Benjamin and Ellen Roberts were married in New York City in 1849. Two years later, in late 1851 when he was 28 and she was 26, the couple had their portraits painted in Pike, New York, by the regional artist Carlos Stebbins.

For decades the paintings had been lost — but recently they were discovered. An Indiana antique dealer, Thomas Brown, acquired them and contacted Roberts Wesleyan College. The two portraits have been purchased and now grace the President's home at the college.

In their diaries, both Ellen (December 25, 1851) and B. T. (January 26, 1852) mention the portraits, and this establishes the year they were done. B. T. says he brought



the portraits home in January 1852 and identifies the artist. "Paid for the two twelve dollars," he noted.

Mr. Brown wrote that the paintings "are in wonderful condition and are fine examples of mid-19th Century portraits painted on linen." For historical reasons they are valuable

because they are in color. Although photographs taken of Benjamin and Ellen both before and after 1851 give more realistic depictions, these portraits, executed about a decade before the Free Methodist Church was founded, do help us better understand the denomination's founders.

Sabbatical Program for Pastors at MMHC

Busy pastors can now spend three weeks to three months at the Marston Memorial Center, using this special time for study, prayer and reflection, and focused research. A new Pastoral Renewal Sabbatical Program has been created under the guidance of Bishop Emeritus Gerald Bates to help Free Methodist pastors sharpen their skills and refresh their spirits.

The Sabbatical Program is the first initiative of the newly-created Center for the Study of Wesley and Society, which will function out of the Historical Center in Indianapolis. The program is available to all FM pastors. Some churches may wish to sponsor their pastor's sabbatical as a way of helping him or her grow in effectiveness.

The purpose of the Sabbatical Program is to

provide a time and place for pastoral renewal, reflection, and enrichment. Sabbaticals are self-directed with the assistance of the staff of the Center, based on a Sabbatical Covenant in which the pastor describes his or her primary passion or interest and proposed activities and outcomes.

For pastors participating in the Sabbatical Program, the Historical Center will provide access to its unique library and archives, a study carrel with Internet access, and reference assistance. The director of the program, Bishop Bates, will assist with mentoring and recommended reading or other resources, depending on the pastors' interests.

Some pastors may wish to use the time to research the history of their own church or con-

(Continued on page 3)

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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.

Helping Hands -

Mid-America Volunteers Assist Historical Center



This summer the Marston Memorial Historical Center welcomed five volunteers from the Mid-America Conference. They dedicated their short-term mission trip to helping sort photographs and memorabilia.

"What a pleasure it was ... to ... see what you do in your passion for the history of the church," wrote Jeremy Smith in a thank-you note to Historical Center Director Cathy Fortner. Smith, associate pastor at Midwest City FMC (OK), led the team that included his wife, Erin, and three teens from their church: Caitlin Hartzell, Beth Fischer, and Shaun Adams.

The idea for the short-term mission trip to the Historical Center was born when Mid-America Conference Superintendent Jeffrey P. Johnson visited and noticed that there were numerous photographs and other items that could be made more easily accessible to those interested in FM history.

When the work-team members arrived for their three days of service, Fortner and Archivist Kate McGinn had several days' worth of tasks waiting for them. But the group worked so efficiently, they were able to complete two other projects as well. Erin and Caitlin had a wonderful time sorting through old photographs, copying down any writing on them (front and back) and estimating their dates; Jeremy, Beth and Shaun worked through some 15 display tables of memorabilia — including a Buddy Lee doll that belonged to Bishop W. T. Hogue.

A special treat, according to Erin, was organizing the Mid-America Conference box. Each conference has one at the Historical Center, but many of the boxes need additional items so current and future researchers will have substantial information about the history of individual conferences. "We always encourage our conferences to send us copies of important documents," says Fortner. These include photographs, newsletters, anniversary and other celebratory bulletins, and information about special events.



Sabbatical Program, continued from page 3

ference, or to study a particular theological or pastoral issue. For others, the sabbatical will provide some concentrated time to work on a sermon series or on church planning. As appropriate, the Center for the Study of Wesley and Society will provide guidance for pastors who hope to publish the fruit of their research in a magazine or journal article.

Pastors on sabbatical (or their churches sponsoring them) will be responsible for the pastor's lodging and meals, but the Historical Center will provide assistance in making arrangements. The process begins with the submission of an application form, which may be requested from the Marston Memorial Historical Center.

In addition to the Pastoral Renewal Sabbatical, the Center for the Study of Wesley and Society intends to sponsor other initiatives, including occasional conferences and publications and a Scholar in Residence program for college and seminary professors. The study center has been started as a means of enhancing the Historical Center's contribution to the denomination and the larger church. Its stated mission is "to promote the study and dissemination of Wesleyan values and theological perspectives, to encourage reflection on these as they relate to congregations and the greater society, and to interject these values and insights into the global discussion of world religion and society." Its specific goals are:

- To strengthen and affirm the theological identity of individuals and congregations in the Wesleyan tradition.
- To provide a venue for Wesleyan research on a diversity of subjects with a bent toward social relevance.
- To provide for expanded use of the unique and valuable resources of the Marston Memorial Historical Center.
- To assist pastors, missionaries, and scholars in research and reflection on themes related to the Wesleyan tradi-

tion and mission in the world and the relevance of these themes for society.

- To provide and resource a sabbatical program for pastors.
- To provide a structure for a Scholar in Residence program.
- To sponsor scholarly events related to historical research and reflection, including presentation of papers on relevant issues in the Wesleyan context and the possible publication of such papers.

● To network with select partners, to share resources, and to partner in appropriate projects. For more information, contact: Bishop Emeritus Gerald Bates, Marston Memorial Historical Center, Box 535002, Indianapolis IN, 46253.

In announcing the sabbatical program Bishop Bates said, "I consider that the Pastoral Renewal Sabbaticals meet two urgent needs of the Free Methodist Church: 1) 'Breathing space' for renewal of energy and commitment among our pastors and 2) the reinforcement among us of the specifically Wesleyan ge-

nius of churchly vision and vibrant spiritual life. This represents a valuable contribution from the Historical Center — using the resources of the past to fuel the future."

The Center for the Study of Wesley and Society grows out of action taken at the spring 2002 meeting of the Committee on Free Methodist History and Archives. Committee Chair Howard Snyder stated, "The Center for the Study of Wesley and Society can be a focal point for new research in the Wesleyan tradition and in the application of a holistic, biblical Gospel to society today. It is a natural extension of the ministry and resources of the Marston Memorial Historical Center."



The MMHC library offers a quiet retreat for study and introspection.

News

otes

- SEVERAL KEY QUOTATIONS FROM B. T. ROBERTS are featured in the first chapter of *Decoding the Church: Mapping the DNA of Christ's Body*, by Howard A. Snyder with Daniel V. Runyon (Baker, 2002). The book was reviewed in the November issue of *Christianity Today*.
- EXTRA COPIES of the Newsletter are available free of charge upon request (up to ten copies to one address). If you wish to hand out the current or back issues, you can make your request by email to History@fmca.org.
- WANTED: OLD FM BOOKS. We've had a request for books written by J.

M. Humphrey and Eliza Suggs. We would like to add these to our collection and make them available to interested pastors and others. We also need some bound volumes of *The Earnest Christian* from the late 1890s and early 1900s. If you have these books sitting on your shelves waiting to be read, we have readers waiting! Please contact the Historical Center. The 2003 MEMBERSHIP CERTIFICATE for the Free Methodist Historical Society will feature the seal of George W. Coleman, General Superintendent from 1886-1903.

LETTERS

I enjoyed the *FM Historical Newsletter*. Your efforts to communicate FM heritage can only benefit the denomination. The article about the death tax, in particu-

lar, deserves elaboration and a voice in *Light and Life*.

— Paul B. Stewart, Assistant Professor of Communication, Roberts Wesleyan College

I have read with deep interest the Summer/Fall 2002 issue of the *FMHS Newsletter*. I note this has been published for at least 2+ years. I have somehow been out of the loop and have not known about this.

A personal hobby has been the collecting and reading of FM/Methodist/Wesleyan historical materials. . . . I consistently keep at least two of these historical books in my active reading stack.

I have been interested in helping preserve, disseminate and interpret our Free Methodist History.

— Bob McDowell

Book Review

"Gospel Simplicity: Rhythms of Faith and Life Among Free Methodists in Victorian America," by Douglas Russell Cullum. Ph.D. Diss., Drew University, 2002.

This recent dissertation is one of the most important contributions to Free Methodist historical studies to appear in some time. Unlike denominational surveys of institutional development, Cullum's dissertation provides a detailed study of early Free Methodist interaction with social and intellectual currents.

Based on extensive research in primary sources, the study also examines Free Methodist piety in the spheres of church, home, and society. Rather than a top-down perspective, Cullum builds his account from the perspective of the people whose lives were shaped by what it meant to be Free Methodist. The result is a brilliantly constructed rendering of Free Methodist piety in terms of its spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions.

According to Cullum, "the women and men who became the early Free Methodists were deeply immersed in the currents of nineteenth-century religious life in America" (1-2), including those inherited from their Methodist parentage. The latter included the "distinctive mingling of primitivism and churchliness" that historian and theologian Albert Outler observed—a tension that in time revealed rival groups *within* Free Methodism, including those who disagreed sharply over such issues as the ordination of women and "freedom in the Spirit" in worship.

Free Methodism was never an isolated sect, but rather consisted of people whose piety was engaged with contemporary culture while critiquing its evils. As Cullum astutely observes, "At the

very center of their religious center was a soteriology" (372). This soteriology was "a piety of gospel simplicity" that "became the defining feature of the Free Methodist way of life." Thus Cullum characterizes "founding-era Free Methodists" as "churchly primitivists."

Among several noteworthy contributions, readers will appreciate the exhaustive study of influences that shaped the ministry of Benjamin T. Roberts; the careful examination of the contributions of evangelist John Wesley Redfield; and the extensive discussion of the "lay" movement and democratic impulses that were critical to the emergence of the movement. The dissertation includes an outstanding section, "Women in Public Ministry," that provides careful studies of such notables as Mariet Hardy Freeland and Ellen Stowe Roberts. Other valuable contributions are the careful study of the early Free Methodist Course of Study and the comprehensive sections on worship, family life, and social responsibility. From a rich array of materials, Cullum presents an excellent portrait of nineteenth-century Free Methodists.

This is a dissertation that cries out for publication. Free Methodists will relish the quality of research and depth of insight that Doug Cullum has presented as a "labor of love" for his denomination. But the study speaks to a much broader audience, providing a splendid portrait of nineteenth-century American evangelical life and thought. Its simplicity of expression makes it one of the most readable dissertations this reviewer has seen. Highly recommended.

— Barry W. Hamilton, Ph.D.

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FREE METHODIST GENERAL CONFERENCE 2003



*The Word became flesh and blood and moved
into the Neighborhood.*
John 1:14 The Message

Historical Center to Sponsor Informal Lunchtime Discussions at 2003 General Conference

If you will be at General Conference in Seattle next summer, plan to grab your lunch and join us for lunchtime "hot issue" discussions that combine FM history with contemporary concerns. The Historical Center will sponsor the lunches on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, July 1-3.

Each lunch session will feature a short presentation and then discussion. Presenters will include David Bundy (Fuller Theological Seminary) and Howard Snyder (Asbury Theological Seminary). Topics for the three days will be:

- Free Methodists: Evangelicals, Wesleyans, or Both?
- What Is a Bishop? Free Methodist Historical Perspectives
- Membership: Does it cost anything to be a Free Methodist?

General Conference 2003 will be held June 28 – July 4 on the campus of Seattle Pacific University.

The Historical Center Welcomes Ning!



In February Kate McGinn (archivist) and her husband Philip traveled to China to bring home their daughter, Eleanor Ning, born 4 February 2001.