

B.T. Roberts  
(1823-93)

Free Methodist Historical Society

# Newsletter

W I N T E R 2 0 0 4 — V o l u m e 4 , N o . 2

## Join the Conversation — “Search for the Free Methodist Soul”: A Symposium

*Search for the Free Methodist Soul: A Cross-Generational Conversation on Free Methodist Identity* will be the focus of a symposium at the World Ministries Center in Indianapolis, March 22-23, 2004. The gathering, which is open to all, is sponsored by the Marston Memorial Historical Center and the newly created Center for the Study of Wesley and Society.

The symposium will begin at 2:00 p.m. on Monday, March 22, and end Tuesday afternoon. Speakers will include Doug Newton, editor of *Light and Life*, and Nazarene historian Dr. Stan Ingersol. Bishop Emeritus Gerald Bates will serve as moderator. Much of the time will be given to open discussion, plus worship and prayer. Additional conversations are projected for March of 2005 and 2006.

The purpose of the symposium is to stimulate reflection on and renewed commitment to the identity and mission of the Free Methodist Church. We will think together about such key themes as:

- Continuity versus Change
- Grace plus Discipline
- Form and Freedom
- Music and Worship

The symposium idea emerged from discussions in the Committee on FM History and Archives, which noted a growing “buzz” of interest across the church about Free Methodist identity in contemporary society. We envision an ongoing dialogue rather than any specific action or resolutions. We will celebrate the witness of the Free Methodist Church in the past and present through our own stories. We want to bridge the generations—young and old, and those in between. Wisdom may be found in intergenerational dialogue. What might the Holy Spirit do if interested people meet to think and pray together about the life and vitality of the Free Methodist soul?

Gerald Bates describes the event as follows: “We hope to strip away the ‘accidentals’ of the Free Methodist presence and dig down to the core, the genius of our movement with its roots in the

Wesleyan legacy of radical Christianity. Perhaps we can rediscover something of the countercultural dimensions that inspired our forbears. We will try to dig beneath some of the cultural accretions and modern adaptations, looking for ‘essence,’ not ‘method’ or ‘persona.’”

Several selected Free Methodists will speak from their own experience on the question: What does it mean to be Free Methodist? Attendees representing different generations and regions will serve as respondents.

Registration is \$25 per person and includes the Monday evening meal and continental breakfast Tuesday. Attendees will be responsible to arrange their own overnight accommodation, but the Historical Center will provide a list of options of homes and motels.

For more information and registration forms, contact the Historical Center.

### The Quotable Roberts

Do not profess perfect love, if you are cross, unamiable, and unkind at home. If you have not natural affection, you certainly have not supernatural. If you do not do as well as the brutes, do not profess to be like the angels of God. If you are not kind to her whom you have sworn to cherish, or to those whose protector nature has constituted you, stop your professions at once. You have already sins enough to sink you to hell, without adding hypocrisy to them.

— B. T. Roberts, “Perfection,”  
The Earnest Christian (Oct. 1884), 127.

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# Grandpa

by Bob Haslam

*“Brother Roberts, would you be so kind as to loan me two dollars?”*

*General Superintendent B. T. Roberts turned with a smile. “I’ll be glad to, Brother Haslam.”*

**This incident, recorded in a small note pad in the 1880s, does not reveal why Hedley Vickers Haslam was in such financial straits that he asked to borrow money from the presiding elder of the Texas Annual Conference. His records include others from whom he borrowed cash. Later, he records his repayments.**



Hedley and Luetta Haslam

The note pads I’ve inherited from my grandfather contain interesting accounts of his travels on horseback in Texas, and later on in the Oregon Territory by horse and buggy. He chronicles collections from the faithful as he visited them in their homes, as well as how he spent his income.

H. V. Haslam, as he is referred to in the old *Minutes (Yearbooks)*, was not a native of Texas, or even of the United States. In 1818 his grandfather, Thomas Haslam, Esq., emigrated from Great Britain and settled on farmland in Canada on Prince Edward Island. He and his wife, Elizabeth, had ten children. One of the first things they did upon arriving in Canada was to erect an Anglican church building on their property. To this day, the Haslams of that area worship at what is now called St. Elizabeth’s Church.

Hedley’s father decided to emigrate southward into the United States in search of better farming land. The family settled for five years in the Saginaw, Michigan area. Winters were harsh, and the growing season all too short. Word came that Texas had wonderful farmland available and a much more generous growing season. The family pulled up stakes and headed south.

Hedley was still a British subject with a staunch background in the Anglican Church. How he became acquainted with the Free Methodists is not known, but he joined the church and began preparing to preach.

In one of his small note pads, my grandfather records the organization of the Texas

Conference in 1881. Texas was at that time a district of the Kansas Conference. But the following record, in handsome handwriting, reads: “The Free Methodist Camp Meeting at Corsicana began on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July. Brother Roberts was present and organized the conference. The Lord was with us and a number of precious souls were saved.”

Curiously, the paragraph closes with these words: “[There was] A great deal of opposition and prejudice.” What that was about, he gives no clue. Nonetheless, B. T. Roberts organized the conference. Hedley V. Haslam was taken into the fledgling conference “on probation.” (Today he would be listed as a “ministerial candidate.”)

Later, Hedley married Abbie Luetta Barrett and raised a family. My father, Oliver Roberts Haslam (middle name for B. T. Roberts), was born in Texas and always owned the Lone Star State as his original home. Oliver was the youngest of three children. His older siblings were Clara and Edwin.

Using small note pads, my grandfather kept meticulous records. These included sermon texts, collections for various purposes, including how much from each person, and personal income and expenses. Some of these are revealing.

Some collections were for special funds, including support for those we now call bishops. These included “Brother Hogue” and “Brother Pearce,” men who were elected to the highest level of leadership in the Free Methodist Church. On July 8, he raised \$12.00 for Hogue; on September 9, the large sum of \$56 for Pearce.

Collections in those day were miniscule by today’s standards. One page lists “Incidental Collections.” November 20, “For Wood” - \$2.25. January 28, “For Oil” - 85 cents. February 22, “For Wood and Oil” \$2.00. And on it went through the year.

To supplement his meager income, Grandpa Haslam listed “Earnings.” These included \$1.10 for “Garden Truck (vegetables),” 50 cents for potatoes, \$1.00 for a book sold, and on September 3 a whopping \$5.00 for performing a marriage ceremony. It wasn’t easy supporting a family on a pastor’s salary in those days.

His lists of disbursements show the difference in the cost of living in those days compared to today. Flour: \$1.25; 50 cents for lard; 30 cents for bacon. Other expenses included an axe handle (20 cents), stove pipe (25 cents), tea (10 cents). His Post Office box cost 25 cents; hay for his horse, 40 cents. He paid 20 cents to get his shoes fixed.

Church members who could not give money sometimes made donations “in kind” to their pastor. Grandpa Haslam lists these gifts and gives them a value. Some examples: Sister Kendall, butter, 15 cents; sack of flour, \$1.30. Cyrus Padgett, envelopes, 50 cents. Brother May, potatoes, 25 cents. He valued a gift of pants and coat at \$5.00. Other donors gave cash in amounts from a few cents to a few dollars.

In those days, pastors were expected to sign up the faithful as subscribers for the church’s publications. Hedley listed on opposite pages of his note pad subscriptions for *The Free Methodist* and *The Earnest Christian*. Some people assume

# Haslam, Pioneer Preacher

that the former was the successor to the latter publication, but such was not the case; Roberts continued publishing the monthly *Earnest Christian* to the end of his life, even after *The Free Methodist* began its weekly publication.

Hedley wrote occasional articles for *The Earnest Christian*, and information concerning his ministry is contained in pages of *The Free Methodist*.

Hedley's ledgers detail his travels in ministry, including stopping to get his horse shod for 50 cents. He visited in homes and held meetings in homes and church buildings, serving as an old-fashioned circuit rider on horseback.

One interesting expense: a clerical collar, which Hedley purchased in Texas. A later note pad, written in Oregon, lists an expense item of 25 cents for neckties. Therein lies the story why I, his grandson, was born out West rather than in the South. Hedley, with his Anglican Church background and British ways, always wore a necktie when preaching or visiting his members. He was prim and proper, feeling that a minister must always be presentable to the public.

The "fathers" of the Texas Conference, however, decided that no pastor in the conference should wear a necktie. Hedley, being the proper Britisher, objected and continued to wear his. An ultimatum was given: Remove the tie or be left without an appointment. With a family to support and a heart for ministry, Hedley complied, much to the relief of his elders in the conference. However, Hedley's conscience bothered him. He felt he was answering to man rather than to God. He prayed and felt the Lord gave him permission to wear a tie.

Hedley's next appointment was in Oregon. There he renounced submission to the crown of England and became an American citizen, necktie and all. He ministered in Oregon, in northern California, and finally in what was then called the Washington Conference.

My grandfather doted on his grandchildren. Since I was the youngest, I received a lot of his attention. Sadly, word came to our home two days after I turned six that Grandpa Haslam had gone to be with the Lord. I was heartbroken. I can remember this venerable "soldier of the cross" lying in

his casket. My father lifted me up so I could see him well. I was old enough to know I'd never see him again on this earth, though I knew I'd see him in heaven some day.

Hedley Vickers Haslam — charter member of the Texas Conference, hardy circuit rider on horseback, meticulous record keeper, and loving grandfather — is still missed by his youngest grandson. He who knew the founder of our church, B. T. Roberts, now hobnobs with Moses, Elijah, and Paul.

But for me, he's just Grandpa Haslam.

**Bibliographic Note:** H. V. Haslam is mentioned in Hogue's *History of the Free Methodist Church* (2:100) and in C. B. Jernigan, *Pioneer Days of the Holiness Movement in the Southwest* (Kansas City, MO: Pentecostal Nazarene Publishing House, 1919), 88. Jernigan tells of the "great holiness revival" that broke out at Corsicana in 1879 and also of some fanatical elements that troubled the movement. This fanaticism lay behind the "opposition and prejudice" which Haslam mentioned, and which early FM leaders had to deal with. See also George McCulloch, *History of the Holiness Movement in Texas, and the Fanaticism Which Followed* (Aquilla, TX: J. H. Padgett, 1886) and occasional reports on the Texas Conference in *The Earnest Christian*. Recently Barry W. Hamilton has explored the fanatical element in "The Corsicana Enthusiasts: A Pre-Pentecostal Millennial Sect" (21 pp.), a paper presented at the 2003 joint meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society and the Society for Pentecostal Studies.



Bob Haslam is a fourth-generation Free Methodist ordained minister. In addition to his grandfather, his great-grandfather, William Barrett, father-in-law of Hedley Haslam, was an

ordained FM minister in Texas. Hedley's two sons, Edwin and Oliver, became FM pastors in Washington State. The author pastored in Washington and in Southern Michigan. He has in his possession the ministerial parchments of his grandfather and great-grandfather. These contain the signatures of the first four general superintendents or bishops of the Free Methodist Church: B. T. Roberts, Edward P. Hart, George W. Coleman, and Burton R. Jones.

## News Notes

• **NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS** — As we begin a new quadrennium, we welcome four new members to the Committee on Free Methodist History and Archives: Norma Cathey, Kathy Callahan-Howell, Bruce Cromwell, and Roy Meador. Norma Cathey, from Seattle, is Pacific Northwest Conference historian. Roy Meador is director of the library at Spring Arbor University. Kathy Callahan-Howell pastors the Winton Community FM Church in Cincinnati; Bruce Cromwell pastors the Centralia, IL, FM Church and teaches part-time at Greenville College.

- Bishop Burton R. Jones, bishop from 1894 to 1919, will be featured as the fourth in the series of 10 collectible Bishops' Seals Membership Certificates. To obtain your certificate with his actual seal, send in your 2004 membership today.
- **IN COMING ISSUES:** Why James Hudson Taylor became a Free Methodist; B. T. Roberts' Notable Friends.
- **EXTRA COPIES** of the Newsletter are available free of charge upon request (up to ten copies to one address). Send email requests to [history@fmca.org](mailto:history@fmca.org).

# Book Review

*Theological Education That Makes a Difference: Church Growth in the Free Methodist Church in Malawi and Zimbabwe*, by Henry Church (Kachere Series, 5; Blantyre, Malawi: Christian Literature Association in Malawi, 2002).

Only occasionally does a book appear that seeks to analyze any aspect of Free Methodist mission (or that of other holiness churches) in a precisely defined region. This volume, a Ph.D. thesis at the University of Malawi, is a welcome addition to that corpus.

The thesis is that “the specific type of theological education programme used by the Free Methodists in Malawi does have an impact on the growth of the Free Methodist Church” (p. 10). The essence of the program appears to be the use of short-term residence courses (modules) undertaken in the context of supervised church planting and ministry. In many ways it appears very similar to the approach of the Free Methodist Pentecost Bands, especially at the Vanguard Mission in St. Louis, before the turn of the twentieth century, as well as to the educational paradigm of early Scandinavian Pentecostal missions.

Nowhere else can one find the information presented here, much of it based on the writer’s personal experience and notes. The book tells how Free Methodism was brought to Malawi from



Rev. Moses Phiri (right) shares with Mr. Kasache, a converted Muslim, in Malawi, 1973

Zimbabwe by Moses Phiri, an expatriate Malawian plantation worker. Phiri obeyed instructions given in a dream and returned to Malawi, where he founded many Free Methodist congregations following 1973. The first Free Methodist missionaries arrived several years later. They established a Bible School in Lilongwe.

Over the period of a few years, the missionary became the controller of mission funds, principal of the Bible School, the chief admissions officer, the primary educator, director of church planting, director of student ministry work, and a deciding voice in the decision of whether to admit the graduate into the ministry of the denomination. Students were required to plant three churches during their five-year Bible School training. Through this process, the Free Methodist Church in Malawi grew at the rate of 15 percent per year, the fastest growth rate of any FM Church anywhere in the world, albeit certainly not the fastest growing church in Malawi.

This is a significant book. It is an important contribution to African Christian history, to the history of Free Methodist mission, and specifically to the study of the culture and religious

life of Malawi. One hopes that similar studies will be forthcoming, written both by missionaries and their African colleagues.

— David Bundy, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California

## B. T. Roberts’ Supporting Cast

*Rev. Asa Abell (1796-1879)*

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

He was an ordained member of the Methodist Episcopal Church since 1821; he had served as a presiding elder for eighteen years; and four times in succession he had been elected and served as a member of the General Conference. His life, his ministry, and his heart belonged to the Methodist Episcopal Church. Yet in time, he could not continue to be part of what saw to be an injustice and an unholy division in the church that he served and loved.

Accused of being part of the “Nazarite Association,” Asa Abell was one of seventeen along with B. T. Roberts who in 1857 formally responded to the charge in a paper, stating the charges “to be unjust, iniquitous, slanderous and false.” For Abell, this was the beginning of the end of a long and cherished relationship and the beginning of a new relationship with a church body that was yet to be born.

In an attempt to explain Abell’s support of B. T. Roberts and the others who were expelled from the Methodist Episcopal Church, historian F. W. Conable suggested that Abell never intended to be a fanatic, but had fallen under the influence of the fanatics. However, Abell’s position might better be explained by his own clear statement of a “distinct profession of the blessing of entire sanctification” that occurred at the Byron Camp Meeting of 1851, and his belief that holiness was a genuine work of God that had falsely been called fanaticism. Humble of heart and desiring to do right in the eyes of the Lord, he was compelled to separate



The General Conference of 1870. Asa Abell is pictured fifth from left in the second row. B. T. Roberts is furthest right on the front row.

from the old and to join with the new.

Abell’s leadership ability and the value of his experience were immediately recognized. His first and all subsequent assignments were in the role of district elder, and he was three times elected delegate to General Conference. Part of his contribution to the newly formed church was to serve along with Loren Stiles (the subject of the second article in this series) on the Committee to Establish a Denominational School — thus helping Roberts cement the new denomination’s commitment to education. The founding of schools that would become Christian colleges has become one of the greatest gifts of the Free Methodist Church to American society.

— Charles Canon, Roberts Wesleyan College

For more on the life of Asa Abell see F. W. Conable, *History of the Genesee Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1810-1872*; W. T. Hogue, *History of the Free Methodist Church*; L. R. Marston, *From Age to Age a Living Witness*; C. H. Zahniser, *Earnest Christian: Life and Works of Benjamin Titus Roberts*.