



B.T. Roberts
(1823-93)

Free Methodist Historical Society

Newsletter

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Missionary Records Document Amazing History, Personal Stories

When I first encountered the writings of the mathematician Archimedes I was much taken with the man. A brilliant, exuberant, and confident fellow, he boastfully claimed that if given a place to stand he could move the world. He was a big believer in leverage. So, too, are we in the Historical Center. The Center houses valuable collections that allow visitors “places to stand” while studying the past.

Among the Center’s myriad files documenting both individual and denominational history is one collection that blends personal and institutional stories with rare eloquence: The files of our deceased missionaries.

Last winter, while the winds raged and snow fell across Indiana, staff from World Missions and the Historical Center took up residence for a week in the mezzanine of the World Ministries Center. We inventoried some 56 boxes of missionary records—a process that entailed much more than listing each box’s contents and securing the bottom with tape, for it was also a rich opportunity to complete our list of FM missionaries. We scoured folders to check or complete birth and death dates and records of service by country and year. We worked to see that only relevant material made the move from warehouse to Historical Center archives—one last and fitting earthly journey.

And one last and fitting resting place. For the lives of missionaries, abbreviated in correspondence with the mission board and sometimes each other, provide countless journeys to be taken. Our wintry week in Indianapolis took us to Africa, Central and South America, Asia, and less-traveled regions of the United States. We read heart-wrenching and humorous stories of Westerners adjusting (or sometimes not) to very different surroundings. Of diseases that killed the strongest and



Rev. Samuel Casberg (c. 1906), missionary to India, with his “Betsy Ross” motorcycle.

conversions that bolstered the weakest. We glimpsed the complexities of raising families in mission lands and the perils manifest when a monotheistic Western religion meets a native polytheistic one that includes customs such as

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The Quotable Roberts



A Call for Live Preachers

Everywhere there is a demand for live preachers . . . saved from indolence and selfishness, from worldliness and ambition, from prejudice and envy . . . full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, . . . of sense and judgment, who can get along with those who differ from them, . . . who can promote revivals and lead believers on to holiness. Such [preachers] are wanted whether they have much or little learning. But there is no call for dead preachers.

— B. T. Roberts, *The Earnest Christian* (Nov. 1884), 163.

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Connections – B. T. Roberts' (Notable)

When Benjamin Titus Roberts was born in 1823, revivalist Charles Finney was 30 years old and not yet famous. When Roberts died in 1893, the colorful Billy Sunday was just beginning his ministry.

Roberts knew neither man personally, though he did hear Finney speak once or twice. Roberts' life and ministry did, however, intersect with a number of nineteenth-century figures whose names are still known. These included Methodist bishop and abolitionist Gilbert Haven, popular Brooklyn preacher Henry Ward Beecher, holiness movement leaders Phoebe Palmer and Thomas Upham, and many others. In 1886 Roberts heard Susan B. Anthony speak at an "equal suffrage convention" in Evansville, Indiana. He noted that Anthony was "well and favorably known throughout the country as a pioneer" for women's rights and said of her two-hour address, "Miss Anthony carried with her the sympathies and the convictions of the intelligent people who listened to her" (*The Free Methodist* [Dec. 1, 1886], p. 8).

Placing B. T. and Ellen Roberts in the same picture with such figures gives us an ampler sense of our roots. Here are a few threads in the larger tapestry.



Hannah Whitall Smith.

While visiting Philadelphia in 1888, B. T. Roberts called on the Quaker holiness evangelists Pearsall and Hannah Whitall Smith. The Smiths, who were several years younger than Roberts, were well known for their "higher life" ministry in England that birthed the Keswick movement. Hannah's 1875 book *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* had become a best-seller. Roberts mentioned the visit in the April 4, 1888, *Free Methodist*, commenting that Hannah was "still busily engaged in evangelical and reformatory labors." He described Pearsall Smith as "a successful evangelist in this country, and more especially in England and on the continent of

Europe, until his health gave out." The Smiths' extensive ministry in Europe in the 1870s was a key link between the U.S. Holiness movement and the Higher Life movement in England.



James Hudson Taylor.

By the 1880s, Hudson Taylor was already famous for founding the China Inland Mission in 1865. An Englishman with Methodist roots, Taylor first went to China in 1854.

Taylor and Roberts met in London in 1888. Roberts had sailed to England as one of two FM delegates to the Centenary Conference of the Protestant Missions of the World, held at London's Exeter Hall in June.

Hudson Taylor was a main conference speaker. In one of the smaller special-focus sessions Roberts heard him read a paper on "The Relation of Itinerant to Settled Missionary Work." Roberts was impressed both with Taylor's work and with his spiritual pilgrimage. It was probably after this session that Roberts went up and introduced himself, and the two men talked and prayed together.

Free Methodist and CIM missionaries later had contact in China. In a sense this is the beginning of a long story, because about thirty years after the London encounter Hudson Taylor's grandson, James Hudson Taylor II, decided to become a Free Methodist missionary, leaving the CIM. Later still, Free Methodist James H. Taylor III would become the head of the mission his great grandfather founded (now called Overseas Missionary Fellowship).

The 1888 London journey gave Roberts the chance to hear or meet a number of other prominent Christian leaders. One night he went to hear General William Booth speak about Salvation Army mis-

sion work, and on a Sunday, along with other conference delegates, Roberts heard Charles Spurgeon preach at Metropolitan Tabernacle.

Jerry McAuley. In the late 1800s, nearly everyone knew the name Jerry McAuley. He was famous for his Water Street Mission in lower Manhattan.



Roberts visited the mission on a summer 1883 trip to New York. He described McAuley, then about 44, as "tallish, raw-boned, Scotch-Irish, shrewd, ignorant, and I believe honest" (Zahniser, *Earnest Christian*, 315). McAuley had founded his mission about a decade earlier; he died a little more than a year after Roberts' visit.

There was a key Free Methodist connection: Frank and Emeline Smith, B. T. and Ellen Roberts' former parishioners at Brockport, were workers at the mission. The couple experienced a deep work of the Spirit under Roberts' ministry, leading to their work among the urban poor. B. T. later described Emeline Smith as "one of the first women called to public labors among us. She helped inaugurate the movement which has opened the door for women to labor in public extensively in most of the churches" (*The Free Methodist* [June 6, 1888], 8).

Water Street Mission itself was largely the fruit of FM ministry among New York's poor. Few realize, W. T. Hogue later wrote, "that Jerry McAuley and his great work . . . were largely the products of Free Methodism" (*History of the Free Methodist Church*, 2:358-61). The mission became a model for city missions across America and in other countries, making McAuley "one of the most important founders of the modern rescue mission movement," says Norris Magnuson in his book *Salvation in the Slums* (p. 9).

A. B. Simpson. Simpson (1843-1919), born in Canada, was a Presbyterian pastor in Louisville and New York City who, like



by Howard A. Snyder

Friends

Roberts, sensed God's calling to preach the gospel to the poor. In 1881 he resigned his prestigious pulpit at Thirteenth Street Presbyterian Church in New York and started a ministry among the poor—"the neglected classes both at home and abroad." This initiative eventually developed into the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

Roberts knew of Simpson and admired his work. When the time came to dedicate two new buildings at Cheshbrough Seminary in 1892, Roberts invited Simpson to come and give an address to mark the occasion. This may have been the only time Roberts met the younger Simpson. Simpson's stirring address was "full of argument, pathos, and power," Roberts commented. "A fire was kindled that will be felt to the remote parts of the earth. A strong missionary spirit prevails among the teaches and students of this Seminary, and it was greatly quickened under [Simpson's] fervent appeals" (*Earnest Christian* [Nov. 1892], p. 157).

Roberts spoke the truth. One student touched that day was Alexander Beers, who was marked for life by Simpson's address. He became "a transformed man—a man with a world-wide vision," his wife wrote. The next year Alexander and Adelaide Beers moved to Seattle to head the FM seminary there (now Seattle Pacific University). The long history of the school's engagement in world missions owes much to A. B. Simpson, and to the meeting of Simpson and Roberts.

And what more shall we say? For space fails us to speak of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Wendell Phillips, Frances Willard, Jonathan and Charles Blanchard, Carry Nation, and India's Pandita Ramabai. We belong to a long chain of influence—much of it for remarkable good.

Bibliographic Note: Material here is excerpted from the writer's forthcoming biography of B. T. and Ellen Roberts. Principal sources are *The Free Methodist*, *The Earnest Christian*, C. H. Zahniser's *Earnest Christian: Life and Works of Benjamin Titus Roberts* (1957), W. T. Hogue's *History of the Free Methodist Church* (2 vols., 1915), and the B. T. Roberts Family Papers.

"MISSIONARY RECORDS," CONT'D. FROM PAGE 1

Traveling the globe and a century we encountered changing attitudes towards mission work and truths still intrinsic. Letters detail ardors of mission life that were often less about privation and more about people with common goals and varied approaches living in close quarters. How and where to build, whether or not to hunt big game, when to overstep the bounds of local government, and when to leave—all topics on which missionaries sometimes disagreed. The discussions could be lively, yet never did individuals lose sight of the call to serve. Woven in also are the tangled threads of theology and evangelism—which some chose to braid and others to leave loosely connected.

We learned too of the tremendous amount of work shouldered by the world missions department. Launching missionaries into foreign fields could take years, especially with events as calamitous as two world wars and a Communist revolution in China. The paperwork could be daunting. Correspondence with the State Department and various national governments complement orders for furniture, magazines, medical equipment, drugs, even garden seeds. These letters—thoughtful, positive, conscientious—convey the deep commitment of those at home and missionaries far away.

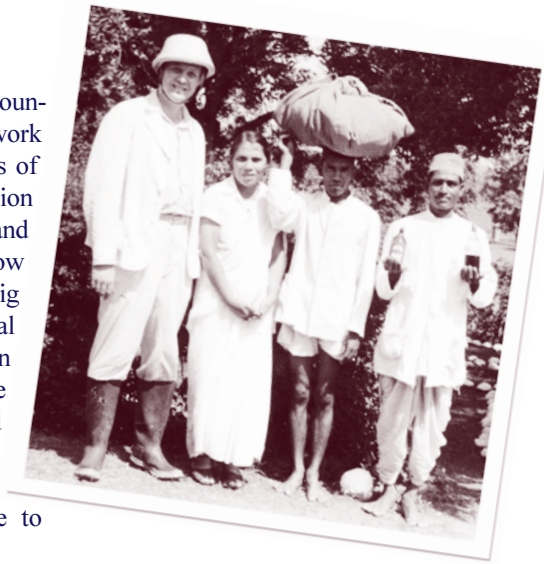
These letters also underscore the faithful support of Free Methodists who contributed to the work with money, scholarships, boxes of supplies and surprises, beds for furloughing missionaries, and churches where missionaries could share their stories.

Missionary records provide amazing leverage—views into some of the world's starkest and remotest climates. In comparison they also illumine the ease of Archimedes' task. How much simpler to move the world with a ball and plank than to harmonize it. How much easier to jolt the globe than to understand the differences that divide us and from there make us new again.

Now resting safely in archival stacks, the missionary files await further processing. As funds and time become available records will be cleaned, neatened, and rehoused in acid-free folders and boxes. Shepherding such records into an archival collection is an exciting and satisfying job. It may lack the glory of the mission field and the spectacular sunsets, but it requires a similar persistent faith that often divines itself in incremental successes. Like missionaries we can appreciate the ravages of dust, the monotony of routine, and the joys of sharing a story.

Because missionary files contain varied material, some of it very personal, strict guidelines govern its use and availability. Individuals interested in consulting the collection may do so through the Historical Center in conjunction with the World Missions staff.

— Kate McGinn, Archivist



△ India 1941: Dr. Melvin Casberg (his father, Samuel, is pictured on page 1) after an emergency call to a village, standing with two orderlies and a female nurse.

News

Notes
▷ Thank you for this heart-warming issue [Spring 2003]. "The Bridge Generation" is a timely message. Those four bishops were serving when I was converted and brought into the ministry of the FM Church. I miss their presence and a sense of awe their ministry brought to the church and to me. Of the four, I had the closest relationship with Bishops Fairbairn and Marston. My wife yet remarks about Bishop Fairbairn grabbing a dishtowel when in our home, but when he went to the pulpit we knew we heard a prophet of God. I've had 54 years of active pulpit ministry and I'm

thankful for the heritage I've had.
— David Jefford, Clearwater, Florida

▷ The fine summary of John Wesley Redfield's preaching emphasis later in life, and an acknowledgment of his role as co-founder of the FM Church stimulated me to write this note. Also, I enjoyed Hamilton's brief review of the Hatch-Wigger book on Methodism and American culture [Summer/Fall 2003]. Phoebe Palmer's stance between the Beecherites and the Free Methodists is a point I have not seen previously.

— Marvin Zahniser, Dublin, Ohio

Book Review

Global Good News: Mission in a New Context, edited by Howard A. Snyder (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001). 269 pp. ISBN 0-68701586-3 (paper).

Global Good News brings together some of the missiological thinking of Snyder and a diverse network of colleagues. Most of the contributors have had significant intercultural experience. Two are from Brazil (Neuza Itioka and Luís Wesley de Souza), Yishey Latt is from Myanmar, Seth Asare is from Ghana, and Mortimer Arias lives in Uruguay.

The book demands the attention of all Christians interested in mission and evangelism. As the authors wrestle with mission, their essays reflect both a variety of perspectives and a common theme: Christians have too often handicapped the “good news” of the Good News by limiting the gospel to particular cultural and intellectual structures. During the last four decades, postmodern philosophy enabled much of the world to value their own experience and to understand the limits of their own culture. Any version of Christianity’s claim to be a global religion was called into question. This global awareness of diversity and cultural specificity has complicated the task of mission in other cultures and in one’s own.

The book’s response to this problem is two-fold. First, the diversity of the church can enrich the diverse elements of the church. Second, in the words of Snyder, “Properly understood and incarnated, the gospel of Jesus Christ really is global good news. It is the

best possible good news for the whole cosmos and for every person and culture in it” (p. 235).

What does this mean for the Free Methodist Church? The denomination has been diverse since its beginning. Educated clergy and businesspersons from New York and under-educated farmers and rural poor from the Midwest united to make the FM Church. It early endeavored to be multi-ethnic and, to an extent, multiracial. Japanese and Italian Free Methodists, among others, made major contributions to building the North American church. Foreign mission programs brought persons around the world into contact with the Free Methodism, so much so that today perhaps as many as seven of eight Free Methodists live outside North America. Immigration over the last half-century brought thousands of Dominican, Haitian, Brazilian, Japanese, Indian and other Free Methodists to North America. The church will need to find ways to help these diverse Free Methodists prosper in their new contexts. It will also need to identify the FM themes that it wants to communicate in mission and evangelism and across generational lines. It will need to find what it can

offer to others as an understanding of Christian faith and then decide if it can open its doors to those outside its doors. It will need to make the Free Methodist Church the bearer of “good news.”

— *David Bundy, Fuller Theological Seminary
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