



B.T. Roberts
(1823-93)

Free Methodist Historical Society

Newsletter

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Historical Center Launches Oral History Project

The Marston Memorial Historical Center has begun an Oral History Project led by Louise Campbell, a member of the Committee on FM History and Archives and an experienced librarian and archivist. The goal is to document as much Free Methodist history as possible through audio and video-recorded conversations with Free Methodists who are living repositories of our shared history.

Mrs. Campbell has developed guidelines for interviewing, a sequence of topics to be covered, and an initial list of persons whose recollections should be recorded. She has been in contact with the Oral History Association, gathering information on recommended procedures and standards. The project will be carried out in col-

laboration with the staff of the Marston Historical Center, and recorded interviews will be available for research purposes at the Center.

In her initial report to the Committee, Louise noted, "Groundwork has been laid for a comprehensive oral history program to include Free Methodists from all walks of life. It is a very enjoyable and intellectually rewarding pursuit." She conducted the first recorded interview with David Shigekawa on



November 23, 2003, and that video is now available for viewing.

Persons to be interviewed will sign a one-page agreement with the Historical Center that specifies rights and the conditions under which the recorded interviews may be used.

SoulSearch II: Indianapolis, March 14-15, 2005

The second "Search for the Free Methodist Soul" symposium will be held this spring. As with the first symposium last March, this inter-generational conversation on Free Methodist mission and identity will meet from midday Monday until noon Tuesday. (See the report on the March 2004 symposium on page two.)

The gathering will continue the conversations begun at the first symposium, though with more of a focus on global Free Methodism. The symposium will include two or three topical presentations, discussions and informal conversations, and time of worship and praise.

The symposium is open to all who wish to participate. No special invitation is required. Complete program details, including registration information, will be given in the next issue of the *Newsletter* and posted on the MMHC website.

The Quotable Roberts



God would as soon fill a man's granary with wheat, who asks for it because he does not like to plow, as to bestow upon any one the gift of the Holy Ghost to take the place of common industry. If you want the gift of power, give yourself to God to do his work! Like Jesus, go about doing good. . . . deny yourself all needless self-indulgence, that you may have the means to help others, and see if God does not wonderfully baptize you with the Spirit!

— B. T. Roberts, "Power," *The Earnest Christian* (May 1885), 154.

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Search for the Free Methodist DID WE FIND

by Gerald E. Bates



History must be intentionally and carefully recited throughout all levels of the church, because, like it or not, history is always being recited by someone somewhere. It is our failure to understand these things — namely, that the transmission of history never stops being a matter of oral tradition; that we don't control the promulgation of history just by discussing it academically or writing it down competently; that even in literary cultures history is still largely a function of verbal transmission by untrained persons — it is our failure to understand these facts that gives rise to the distortion of history and mutation of ideas that ultimately undermine a people's sense of identity and mission.

— Doug Newton, Editor,
Light and Life

Churches gravitate toward the evangelical mainstream [and away from their distinctive roots] for various reasons. Often they want to conform. Their wild and woolly days are over and they want to be respectable. They also gravitate toward it because churches can fail at their catechetical tasks and the people — Wesleyan people — sometimes can no longer distinguish between the Wesleyan message and the message of radio and television preachers. There is tremendous pressure to polish away the rough edges of the Wesleyan vision and yield to a generic evangelicalism.

— Stan Ingersol,
*Denominational Archivist,
Church of the Nazarene*



CAN WE DISCOVER THE ESSENCE OF FREE METHODISM AND HOW IT RELATES TO PRESENT REALITIES? QUESTIONS LIKE THIS CHARACTERIZED THE CONTENT OF AN EVENT ENTITLED “SEARCH FOR THE FREE METHODIST SOUL,” SPONSORED BY THE COMMITTEE ON FREE METHODIST HISTORY AND ARCHIVES AND HELD AT THE WORLD MINISTRIES CENTER IN INDIANAPOLIS ON MARCH 22-23, 2004.

Seventy participants of varied ages, experience and backgrounds — local church members, scholars, pastors, missionaries, bishops, church planters, social agency workers — came together to explore the topic and ponder the Free Methodist experience. None were official representatives; all were there because they wanted to be. Devotional thoughts were brought by Bishops Joe James and Les Krober. As a whimsy the group learned and sang the Gaither song, *The Wesley Brothers* (“How the Wesley brothers preached the love of God”).

Lots of stories were told — stories out of little churches and big churches, campgrounds, schools and revival meetings.

There were areas of broad agreement and many perspectives and variations on the theme. The structure of the event with alternating presentations, respondents, small groups and plenary feed-back sessions allowed for generous interaction and sharing of views.

Did we find the Free Methodist soul? Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that there is serious commitment to many of the historic and continuing marks of Free Methodism. No, in that no final profile emerged or was attempted. Anticipating this, two further sessions are scheduled for March 14-15, 2005 and March 13-14, 2006 (Monday-Tuesday schedule). It is likely that the 2005 event will include international input; today the Free Methodist soul is not confined to North America or the North American experience.

Presenters stretched the group with perceptive insights. *Light and Life* Editor Doug Newton emphasized the necessity for any religious community wishing to preserve its identity and mission to recite its history, noting the tendency for human memory to recede over the horizon with the passing of time. He observed that while we share elements of emphasis with many denominations, still there is a special flavor to the Free Methodist configuration which gives us identity.

Stan Ingersol, Church of the Nazarene historian and archivist, listed a number of identifying indications of the early Free Methodist passion: Religion of the warm heart and holiness, justice issues for slaves and the poor, a strong democratic impulse, and a church with clear expectations of its members (a “believers church”). Ingersol also defined some of the influences bearing on Free Methodism today — the pulls of both fundamentalism and generic evangelicalism, neither of which encompasses the full passion of the Wesleyan vision. He concluded that Free Methodists have before them the task of examining critically and theologically the imported models and pragmatic tendencies which impact the church.

Presenter Linda Adams, pastor of New Hope Free Methodist Church in Rochester, New York, raised issues of urban relevance for the denomination. In preparation for her presentation she had circulated an email query to friends asking, “Are we truly meant to be ‘just

Soul - IT?

Christians, or is there something important about being Free Methodists?"

Some of the answers included questions, such as "Who says we've lost our soul?"

Another asked, "When are we at our best?" and responded, when we exercise restorative grace.

Linda introduced Howard Snyder's "(Sort of) Free Methodist Quadrilateral" which places the Free Methodist experience at the center of a force field with four corners: 1) Anglo-Catholic, highlighting liturgy and creed; 2) Evangelical, stressing conversion and biblical authority; 3) Anabaptist, emphasizing social justice and radical discipleship; and 4) Charismatic, with emphasis on Spirit endowment, ecstasy ("Getting blessed"), and sanctification.

Respondents picked up on varied Free Methodist themes. Jennifer Starr-Reivitt, church planter of a Free Methodist congregation called Sanctus in Kalamazoo, Michigan, emphasized the importance of ordaining women and the attractiveness of holiness teaching for the newly churchd. Jon Kulaga, professor at Spring Arbor University, named connectedness, doctrine, and concern for the disenfranchised as significant markers for Free Methodism. Bob Cannon insisted on authenticity in our practice, being what we claim to be.

Reports from the small groups included serious concern for emphasis on personal and social holiness, a message of optimism with respect to God's grace and power, the necessity of theological reflection undergirding our worship, and the centrality of prayer.

"Search for the Free Methodist Soul"



Respondent Jennifer Starr-Reivitt pastors a church plant in Kalamazoo, MI.

was, as it was intended to be, the opening of a conversation. Not everything has been said so there will be the follow-up

events for further exploration, deeper digging, expanding horizons, and more thought. Surely worthy things for Free Methodists to do.

The three main symposium presentations are available by email attachment from history@fmcna.org. Together with other materials they will soon be posted also to the Marston Memorial Center website. The three main papers are: Doug Newton, "The Importance of Recital to the Recovery of the Soul of the Free Methodist Church"; Stan Ingersol, "Free Methodist Trajectories"; and Linda Adams, "Searching for the Soul of the Free Methodist Church."



I have spent a few years of my life worshipping in churches that are not Free Methodist. The thing that brought me back home was our position on women in ministry. That is one of the things that cannot melt into the pot! Our founder valued that freedom, and spent a lot of his [energy] fighting for it. Do we teach it, and model it, and faithfully pass the baton to the next generation? Is equality in the New Community something people can feel when they come to our churches?

— Pastor Linda Adams,
New Hope Free Methodist Church,
Rochester, New York

News & Notes

▷ PASTORS' SABBATICAL PROGRAM – The Center for the Study of Wesley and Society sponsors research and renewal sabbaticals at the Marston Memorial Historical Center—three weeks to three months. Some funding is available. Contact the Historical Center or Bishop Emeritus Gerald Bates.

▷ EXTRA COPIES of the Newsletter free of charge are available upon request (up to ten copies to one address). If you wish to hand out the current or back issues to friends or family, you can make your request by email at History@fmcna.org.

▷ ROBERTS BIOGRAPHY – Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company has committed to publish *Populist Saints: B. T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists* (tentative title) by Howard A. Snyder in a cooperative arrangement with Roberts Wesleyan College, Free Methodist Communications, and the Marston Memorial Historical Center. Publication date will probably be late 2005.

▷ IN COMING ISSUES: "He Served God with his Mind," profile of Dr. Orville S. Walters, by Louise Campbell; "The Rediscovery of Pandita Ramabai (and the FM Connection)."

LETTERS

▷ Thanks for sending the Newsletter. As one interested in history, and particularly of our denomination, I enjoy each informative issue. Just wish it could be larger! The "Connections" article was particularly interesting. I wasn't aware of some of these connections.

— Bob Crandall

▷ I greatly enjoyed the last issue of the *FMHS Newsletter*. I was especially intrigued by "B. T. Roberts' (Notable) Friends." I would like to send it to one of my daughters, who is in ministry in a large CMA Church. I was so interested in the connection between B. T. Roberts and A. B. Simpson.

— Bob McDowell

Book Review

"On the Journey Home": The History of Mission of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1946-1968, by J. Steven O'Malley (New York: General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 2003). xiv, 285 pages. ISBN 1-89056950-X.

This history of mission of a sister denomination should have particular interest for Free Methodists. The author of this volume, Steven O'Malley of Asbury Seminary, is a leading historian of the holiness and Pietist movements.

When the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) Church merged with the much larger Methodist Church in 1968, forming the United Methodist Church, over a century of EUB missions history was in danger of being lost. O'Malley helpfully preserves the story in this rich overview of EUB missions. The book is volume four in a projected series of six that document the mission history of the various groups that eventually became a part of the United Methodist Church.

The EUB Church existed as such for only twenty-two years, from 1946 to 1968. O'Malley however covers the earlier mission work of the groups that formed the EUB—the Evangelical Association and the United Brethren, groups with German Pietist and (in the case of the UB) Mennonite roots tracing back to the late 1700s and early 1800s.

O'Malley documents the "indigenous and cooperative approach" or "cooperative and unitive pattern" that in most cases marked the EUB tradition as part of its inheritance from Pietism. Mission endeavors were marked by "traditional EUB optimism"

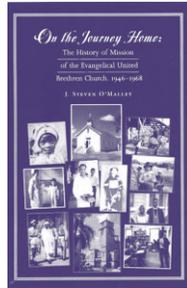
that traced back to Pietist hopes for (as Philip Otterbein put it) "a more glorious state of the church than ever has been." O'Malley shows that EUB missions left a remarkable heritage of indigenous and ecumenical mission-and-church endeavors (particularly in China, Japan, the Dominican Republic, and the Philippines). At the time of the EUB-Methodist merger in 1968, EUB mission work was generally much more ecumenical and cooperative than were Methodist missions. The EUB played a key role in the formation of united churches in a number of countries—in the process, of course, surrendering its own identity.

O'Malley also covers in considerable detail EUB work in Germany, especially after World War II, and extensive home mission work in the U.S., such as Red Bird Mission in Kentucky, originally started by the United Evangelical Church (one of the antecedents of the EUB) in 1919.

The book draws on a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including interviews with (now aged) former EUB mission leaders. O'Malley shows how EUB missions were motivated by a theological vision of the kingdom of God, but he is candid also in showing that the church did not always live up to its vision.

The EUB provides an interesting case study of how initial values and commitments can persist over generations within a denomination or movement. A comparative study of EUB and FM missions would be instructive. Though EUB and FM missionaries were much alike in theology and experience, generally FM missions did not have the strong ecumenical thrust that marked the EUB.

— Howard A. Snyder, *Asbury Theological Seminary*



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