



B.T. Roberts
(1823-93)

Free Methodist Historical Society

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How Archives Change Lives — “Send Me!”

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”
And I said, “Here am I; send me!” (Isaiah 6:8)*

One may not naturally associate Isaiah 6:8 with the archivist’s world. But it is in fact a passage very dear to us archivists—one that bespeaks our own place in the missionary endeavor.

To many, the archivist’s world seems a quiet one, lived in a kind of dusty solitude with papers and photographs our boon companions. Many think of the archive as a place where stories are told by sight rather than sound. But if you sit and listen, you can hear documents speak. And sometimes they seem to say, “Send me!”

Though not missionaries, documents that answer this call can provide material help in dramatic ways. Two examples underscore the point. Last year, World Relief requested documentation that established the Free Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. The three letters we sent assisted in bringing food from across the border to famine victims.

Another instance: A relief worker in Arizona tracked down a Kirundi dictionary compiled by

Betty Ellen Cox. The organization requested twenty copies to be distributed to a group of Burundi immigrants struggling with their new language.

In my more fanciful moments I think of Isaiah 6:8 as a rallying cry of sorts. “Send me,” say the scrapbooks compiled by Edith Jones and Kate Leininger. Or the journals of Grace Allen, a missionary of extraordinary patience and persistence in South Africa. What of the minutes from annual conferences where the abolition of slavery was battled? Or the testimonies of Free Methodists who took on that insidious adversary, poverty?

I sit in my office and wonder: Who shall ask me, and what shall they request? To whom can I “send these”?
— Kate McGinn, Archivist



▲ Betty Ellen Cox types the Kirundi dictionary in June 1963.

Light and Life Hour Tapes Transferred to Compact Discs

“The Light of the world is Jesus!” For decades Free Methodists and others could click on their radios and hear that hymn chorus introducing *The Light and Life Hour*, the weekly radio voice of the denomination. Begun in 1944 under the leadership of Dr. LeRoy M. Lowell, the award-winning national broadcast continued until 1982. During most of that time the radio pastors were Myron F. Boyd (1945–65) and Robert F. Andrews (1965–80).



Today however, decades-old master tapes and discs, the audio archive of thousands of weekly broadcasts, are deteriorating. So the Historical Center has begun a program to preserve these classic old programs on compact discs (CDs). With the help of Kevin Weinman of the Aldersgate FM Church in Indianapolis, several master tapes from 1967 have been converted to CD format and others are in process.

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◀ Radio pastor Myron F. Boyd served as a Free Methodist bishop from 1964-1976.

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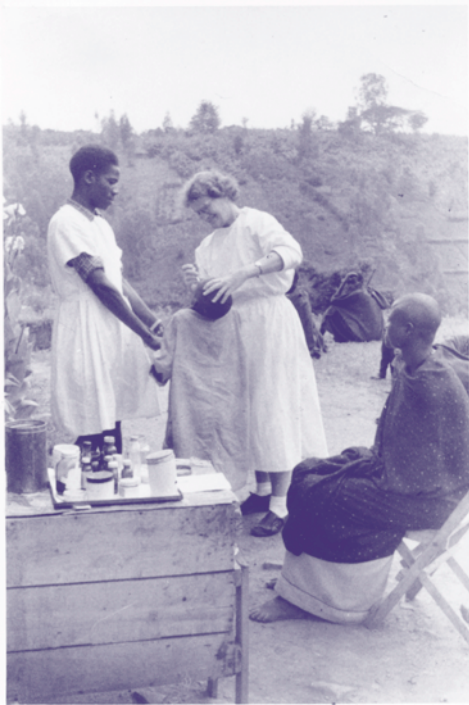
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The Mission of the Free Methodist Historical Society is to preserve Free Methodist heritage and transmit it faithfully to each generation in order to assist the Free Methodist Church in fulfilling its mission.

Margaret Holton

PIONEER NURSE TO CENTRAL AFRICA



“One man’s shoulder had been bitten by a lion four days previous to his coming. His shoulder was swollen twice normal size and swelling extended down in the arm. His temperature was quite high.” —Kibuye, Burundi, January 1940.

“I am with the sick from morning until night, and sometimes at night. Prenatal day, Friday. I now have over one hundred cases.” —Kibogora, Rwanda, 1952.

“At the moment I have three mothers in the tent while the mother house is being renovated, another in a room in my house.” —Muyebe, Burundi, 1961. The following year, 1962, she reports 400 deliveries and comments on one day when “God came in power at the service [devotions at the dispensary] and several received Christ.”

Deep in the foundations of the phenomenally growing church in central Africa are amazing stories of sacrificial missionary service—among these, records of a corps of dedicated medical workers such as pioneer nurse Margaret Holton. Arriving only four years after the opening of Free Methodist work in the area, she made her single-minded contributions in clinics (two of which are now hospitals), schools, Sunday schools, and tiny outstations that became churches. Everywhere she showed a tireless love for the people—treating their illnesses, birthing their babies, teaching their women, and spreading the joy of the gospel.

These are tiny glimpses of the faithful service of a dedicated missionary nurse, Margaret Holton.

Margaret was born at McCarron in the rugged lumber country of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. When she applied for missionary service Superintendent G. W. McDonald said, “I believe she has good timber in her.” Her pastor, A. L. Howlett, wrote in his recommendation, “She is of sturdy stuff.”

Margaret’s call to missionary service came at a camp meeting in 1925 as part of her conversion. “In my mind it was settled,” she wrote. “The Lord has called me to be a missionary to Africa.” On her missionary application, to the question “In what field do you desire to labor?” she wrote, “Africa.” The next question, “What field would be your second choice?” she left a blank.

Ministry in Africa

Margaret shipped out of New York harbor on August 5, 1938 for language study and tropical medicine studies in Belgium. In her first term in Burundi she did baby clinics and prenatal classes which she counted as “wonderful opportunities—teaching the mothers.” She invited leaders’ wives to

come to her home where she taught them “to raise the standard of women.” She reported that half her time in the first term was teaching in the school and visiting the hill schools. Later she founded the adult Sunday school at Muyebe, opened the medical and midwifery clinic there and opened a weekly clinic at another station, Rwintare, eighteen miles away.

But Margaret was more than work. She had a delightful quirky sense of humor and an immense ability not to take herself too seriously. One of the choice stories from her life is when she was peeling onions and a young missionary boy came by to see tears coursing down her cheeks. “Why are you crying, Aunt Margaret?” Deciding to have a little fun with him she wailed, “Nobody loves me!” “Well,” he said, considering this, “I know my daddy doesn’t, but the rest of us do.”

One time the doctor assigned Margaret to take the temperature of a sick missionary colleague on a very strict schedule. The patient however had decided to get some extended rest, and locked Margaret out. At the appointed time, finding the door locked and not being able to rouse anyone, Margaret circled the house until she found an unlocked window

and, thermometer in hand, crawled over the sill. To the startled patient she is reported to have said, “The doctor said at this time, and this time it is.”

Margaret inspired tremendous loyalty in her African coworkers. She mentions Ncishako, her head nurse for years, who never complained at taking night call, only calling her for the hard cases.

Missionaries recall Margaret’s nearly legendary standing with Africans. She was a familiar figure going vigorously up and down the steep path to her clinic at Muyebe, engaging in greetings, admonitions, advice on the run, all the way up or down the hill. They laughed with her, and sometimes at her. She enjoyed Africans, loved to match wits with them, and loved them through her work. Dealing with life and death matters, she was a strict disciplinarian, demanding and getting high performance. There was almost nothing within their reach that they would not do for her.

Friend and Mentor

Margaret sort of adopted the Bateses because she had attended school at Spring Arbor with Marlene’s parents. While we were studying in Belgium she wrote to us her version of missionary orien-

ton

BY GERALD BATES

FRICA, 1938-1962

tation: “You may think missionary work is sitting under a palm tree with all the eager natives coming to hear your words of wisdom. Well, it’s not like that.” She did not elaborate further what it really *was* like.

As first-time guests in her home at Muyebe, in 1958, we were commanded to leave our muddy shoes outside our bedroom door. The next morning at daybreak her faithful worker Bisambi knocked on our door, left a tray of hot tea and cookies, and our shined shoes.

Margaret’s hospitality and that of her staff knew no limits. Her primitive kitchen was a warm and friendly place to try out our fledgling language skills, and it produced lots of good food. In her home, in conversation, she would express an opinion and then watch shrewdly with a slight smile to see what your reaction might be.

Margaret pioneered the medical work at Kibogora, where there is now a large hospital of national reputation. Her successor there, Myra Adamson, remembers a long list of “recipes” for all kinds of potions and remedies—for coughs and itch and eyes and ulcers. Margaret trained African nurses to do the microscopic exams and the yaws injections. Patients came by the hundreds.

Margaret informally adopted a little Tutsi orphan girl, Mukakabera. When she returned to Burundi she took the girl with her and placed her with a family there. In 1995 Myra Adamson while on a volunteer stint in Rwanda was visiting the museum in Butare.

The guide, learning that she had worked at Kibogora and asking a few questions, cried out, “Margaret Holton is my mother-in-law!” He was a Tutsi who had fled to Burundi, married Mukakabera, and had now come back to Rwanda after the genocide.

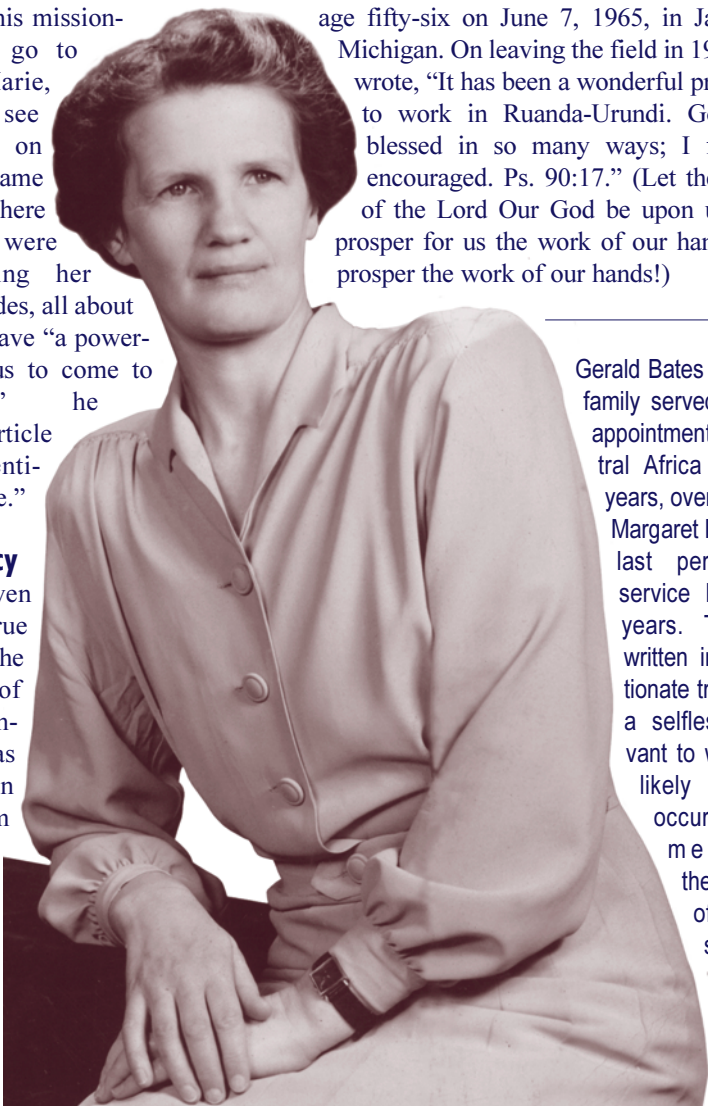
Dr. Al Snyder recalls as a young doctor taking off a few days from his medical residency prior to his missionary service to go to Sault St. Marie, Michigan, to see Margaret, then on furlough. She came to the motel where the Snyders were staying, bringing her projector and slides, all about Kibogora. She gave “a powerful appeal for us to come to Ruanda-Urundi” he writes in an article significantly entitled, “Providence.”

A Living Legacy

Only heaven knows the true dimensions of the contributions of medical missionaries such as Margaret Holton—many of them working solo, as she did, much of the time and with only the most basic of equipment and facilities. They leave

their legacy in the foundation of the great and growing church in central Africa. They showed (and show today) very concretely the value and dignity of human life so central to the gospel. Margaret’s is a saga of the “laying down of a life,” day after day, night after night, for the people she loved.

Margaret Holton died of heart failure at age fifty-six on June 7, 1965, in Jackson, Michigan. On leaving the field in 1962 she wrote, “It has been a wonderful privilege to work in Ruanda-Urundi. God has blessed in so many ways; I feel so encouraged. Ps. 90:17.” (Let the favor of the Lord Our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands—O prosper the work of our hands!)



Gerald Bates and his family served under appointment to central Africa for 28 years, overlapping Margaret Holton’s last period of service by four years. This is written in affectionate tribute to a selfless servant to whom it likely never occurred to measure the impact of her service.

Light and Life Hour, cont’d.

As David McKenna notes in *A Future with a History* (1997), *The Light and Life Hour* “gave Free Methodists a national and international identity that positioned the church for a leadership role in the Information Age.” He adds, “Who knows how much the radio broadcast served as a ‘unifying agent’ for the church?” (pp. 326, 198).

The transfer of these radio programs to compact discs is being done for archival purposes. However if there is sufficient interest, copies can be made for people

who may wish to purchase them for their private use.



▲ Like Boyd, Robert F. Andrews’ service as a bishop (1979-1991) overlapped his work on the *Light and Life Hour*.



The Quotable Roberts

[A] compassionate spirit is an essential element of the Christian character. It is an ornament of grace: it makes the uncouth attractive. But it is more than an ornament, it is an indispensable trait of the true saint of God. It must be fostered by constant exercise, until we get into such a state that we cannot be happy unless we are making others happy.

— B. T. Roberts, “Sympathy,”
The Earnest Christian (Jan. 1890), 32

Book Review

Episcopacy in the Methodist Tradition: Perspectives and Proposals, by Russell E. Richey and Thomas Edward Frank (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004). 147 pp. ISBN 0687038618 (paper).

A 2003 proposal of the United Methodist Council of Bishops for a four-year presidency of their body prompted this study by Emory University colleagues Russell E. Richey and Thomas Frank. The book focuses on the Methodist view of episcopacy as itinerant general superintendency and asks how this can be most effective.

Much of the book is historical: What was the role of bishops in early Methodism? What was Francis Asbury's role and influence? What is current United Methodist understanding?

"Rather than try to sort, prioritize, and codify the complexity of the Church and its multiple organizational logics," the authors argue, "bishops and those who elect and work with them would be better served by a deepening sense of what people and institutions want when they call for leadership." The church is not a fixed institution but rather a dynamic entity in constant motion, interacting with and ministering to the surrounding environment of human communities, institutions, and landscapes. Effective bishops use their power to empower others.

The book contrasts the American Methodist understanding of "itinerant general superintendency" with other options available when the church was founded. Richey and Frank believe bishops should reclaim "the patterns of the apostolic church," sustaining

the oneness, holiness, and catholicity of apostolicity—for which itinerancy is essential. The presence of an itinerant superintendency throughout the church helps communicate direction and unify disparate congregations.

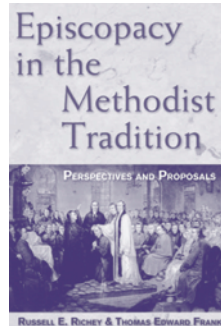
The authors suggest that "the character of Methodism as a kind of secularized monasticism gave its bishop's role some of the features of an abbot or head of an order." The bishop was expected to represent the unity of the church's movement in Christ.

Several recent United Methodist proposals are discussed in the last third of the book. Multiple issues arise: Should bishops be elected by General Conference? What exactly is the bishops' role in presiding at conferences? Reflecting current United Methodist discussions, these issues have less relevance to current Free Methodism.

More directly relevant is the general discussion of episcopacy itself. Richey and Frank argue implicitly that a foremost role of bishops is sacramental—a bishop's very presence in a congregation or conference is part of the episcopal function. Not first of all administrators or decision makers, bishops are to listen, to serve, to be present to local churches so that churches' needs can effectively be met.

Free Methodists seeking "once again to become a movement" and reaffirm our mission may find this book a useful reminder that early Methodism never "had" a mission. Rather it was a mission movement, starting new class meetings and worshiping congregations across the developing American landscape. The focus was not so much on what to do but on what to be. Perhaps that's the most important focus for episcopacy as well.

— *Pastor Bruce N. G. Cromwell, Centralia, Illinois*



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