



B.T. Roberts  
(1823-93)

FREE METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# Newsletter

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## Marston Historical Center Considers Options for Expanding Program and Facilities

**A**s reported in the Spring 2011 issue of this *Newsletter*, the Marston Memorial Historical Center is exploring options for expanding its ministry in the wake of last summer's historic Sesquicentennial General Conference.

Sensing a groundswell of new interest in Free Methodist heritage as a key resource for the church's mission today, the Committee on Free Methodist History and Archives has begun planning for a broader range of ministries to the church. This likely will require the expansion and redesign of the Historical Center facilities in Indianapolis and a significant fund-raising campaign.

On October 14 Bishop Emeritus Gerald Bates, on behalf of the Marston Historical Center, presented a report to the FM Board of Administration that outlined the Center's vision and requested approval in principle. The BOA strongly endorsed the report, which in effect encourages the Historical Center to proceed with its planning.

In its report the Committee on FM History and Archives noted, "We see the need for a major renovation and expansion of the Historical Center. This should include a 'storyboard' approach to display FM history and heritage; an illustrated visual walk through FM history using artifacts and a timeline that tells our story—beginning in 1860 and ending up in the world today."

The Board of Administration's approval in principle of the Historical Center's report sets the direction for the Center's activities in coming years. The report identifies the need "to expand the space of the Marston Historical Center, perhaps eventually up to a doubling of



the current space (from approx. 3,000 sq. ft. to 6,000 sq. ft.)." In coming months the Historical Committee will work on next steps, including architectural and design plans.

The Historical Center also plans to sponsor a series of symposiums or joint meetings with various special-focus groups within the denomination in order to make the church's historical resources more accessible and more fully utilized. One possibility would be a joint session between Historical Center personnel and the denominational Study Commission on Doctrine (SCOD).

Significant financial resources will be required to turn this vision into reality. Fund-raising efforts will focus both on immediate projects and on building a substantial permanent endowment. □



You can read the complete Marston Historical Center Report to the Board of Administration by scanning the code printed here with your smartphone.

## COMING NEXT ISSUE:

- ▶ "Those Amazing Male Quartets," by Marvin Zahniser
- ▶ Review of G. Herbert Livingston's new memoir, *Walking Together Through Life*

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.

# Clara Wetherald,

## ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN'S ORDINATION

— BY CHRISTY MESAROS-WINCKLES —

In 1890 Clara (Miller) Wetherald of the East Michigan Conference served as one of the first two women delegates at a Free Methodist General Conference. The presence of women delegates was especially significant because B. T. Roberts had presented a resolution that would allow women's ordination as elders. (The second woman delegate was Anna Grant from North Indiana.)

Prior to the General Conference the denominational magazine, *The Free Methodist*, printed many articles for and against women's ordination. Wetherald, an active contributor, published an article in May 1890 entitled "Shall Women be Ordained?" Why did many men oppose women's ordination? The real reason, Wetherald said, was that "man is not satisfied to be the head as God has designed him, but he seems to aspire to be being neck and arms, and in fact the whole body, and monopolize the whole seat of authority."

### THE 1890 GENERAL CONFERENCE

Wetherald passionately defended women's ministry during the conference debates. She herself was a licensed evangelist, but as a woman could not be ordained. When someone proposed that the ordination question be sent back to the annual conferences for a vote, Wetherald adamantly objected. As one of only two women delegates, Wetherald stood before a room of men and defended her own ministry and that of other women. She declared:

I am opposed to the resolution. In some conferences there will be a large majority for the resolution. In other conferences which have no opportunity to prove the efficiency of women as preachers, [many] will vote against it. Only those conferences where women have labored will not hesitate to pass it. For twenty-four years I have preached the gospel and have never been laid aside from the ministry but six months. I have had people come many miles to have me marry them, and I would not do it. I have labored many years for \$100 a year. The railways refuse to grant permits to women who are not ordained, no matter if they are licensed. I do not stand here because I want to be honored. That is all taken out of my heart. There are those who have been saved under my labors who have desired to receive the Lord's Supper from my hands; but I could not administer it. God has given us this right, but the conference refuses it.

Reports in the 1890 *General Conference Daily* reveal Clara Wetherald as the poster child for women's ordination. Wetherald preached twice at General Conference, and both times she addressed women's roles in the church and pushed for women's



Clara as a child (around age 12)  
Top row (left to right): Clara Miller (Wetherald) and Sarah Miller  
Bottom row (left to right): Harvey Miller (Clara's father), Commodore Perry Miller, Frank Miller

ordination. In her October 16, 1890, sermon "On the Ordination of Woman" Wetherald boldly challenged the assumption that women cannot handle independent ministry. She declared:

Let women be considered in the matter. [Some people] say woman is not adapted to the regular ministry. I think she is peculiarly fitted to care for souls. . . . I know we have responsibilities that others do not have; and I think of all others we should have the support of the church. I do not see why the heavens should fall and everything be turned bottom side up if five elders should lay their hands on my head and say, "Take thou authority to preach the word of God and to administer the holy sacraments in the congregation." I know that the Lord has laid his hand upon my head, and he will carry me through.

### A LIFE OF EFFECTIVE MINISTRY

Until recently, most of what was known about Wetherald's contributions to the Free Methodist Church was limited to her role as delegate at the 1890 General Conference. In fact, her contributions extend back to 1875 when she and her husband John left the Methodist Episcopal Church and joined the Free Methodists. Wetherald's oldest brother, Commodore Perry Miller, had been an ordained FM elder since 1868, and most likely he encouraged Clara and John to join the denomination. As Free Methodists the Wetheralds worked together in ministry, founding several churches and holding revival services across Michigan. They spent most of their ministry in the Eastern Michigan Conference, where John was eventually appointed conference evangelist.

Clara was often jointly appointed with John, as indicated

in the conference minutes; appointments often read, “John Wetherald and wife.” Clearly the Wetheralds worked together. Women couldn’t be ordained as elders, but as licensed evangelist Clara found ways to preach and serve in ministry. When she was just sixteen she told her family that she intended to be a preacher, and she did what she could to fulfill that call.

Clara and John probably divided the circuits they served so they could cover more territory and have more effective ministry. Clara often appears to be preaching on her own. A report in the October 10, 1888, *Free Methodist* illustrates this. Clara describes a church dedication she conducted at Royalton, Michigan. “It was a great cross to me to go to dedicate a church, as I consider myself a poor hand to raise money,” she wrote. Despite her qualms she led the congregation in a time of prayer on Saturday, September 29, 1888, since she was opposed to raising money on the Sabbath. As Wetherald and the congregation prayed for donations, people began screaming out amounts of money they could give. Wetherald recollects, “The Spirit of God fell with power upon the people. The sister who had subscribed five dollars was so blest that she stood up shouting glory; holding up both hands she said, ‘I’ll sign five more for my husband; he’s not here.’” The fundraising was a success; \$400 was raised for the church building.

Opponents of women evangelists and of women’s ordination often argued that women simply could not handle both the responsibilities of home and the grueling work of itinerant ministry. Yet Clara and John ably balanced domestic life and their church duties. They raised two daughters, Mary and Henrietta. Mary published her personal testimony in *The Free Methodist* in April 1888, giving her mother much credit for her conversion. Describing her parents’ roles as ministers, Mary related how they held revivals together.

It is clear that Clara was the dynamic, prophetic preacher while John was gifted at mentoring. The 1902 *Free Methodist* obituary for John credits him with leading many young men into ministry.

#### FROM FM TO CONGREGATIONALIST

But then, despite the Wetheralds’ dynamic ministry in the FM Church, they disappear from denominational records in late 1891, only a year after Clara’s groundbreaking role as General Conference delegate and orator. Early in 1891 John Wetherald made the *Saginaw News* for succumbing to the temptations of the “gay ladies” of that city. When he returned to the FM Church in Clio, Michigan, where the couple was living and most likely serving in ministry, he confessed his sins at a prayer meeting. John’s actions led to him being considered apostate, and he was subsequently removed from ministry and membership in the FM Church.

Clara herself had grown up in a home where her mother divorced her father in 1862 for adultery. She was not willing to put up with or forgive John’s actions, apparently, and filed for divorce. There is no record of Clara being removed from the denomination. However, due to her status as a divorced woman and her desire to pursue ordination, she joined the Congregationalist Church where she was ordained and appointed to Gaylord, Michigan, by the church’s regional council in 1893. This made Clara Wetherald one of the first women in the country to be ordained—an event that was hailed by the suffragist movement as a step forward for women’s rights.

Clara served thirty years as an ordained Congregationalist minister before her death in 1921. Her brother Frank Miller wrote in her obituary in *The Free Methodist* that during her life Clara held revivals from coast to coast and led thousands to Christ. While Clara clearly was early drawn to the FM Church, her ministry was ultimately larger than a denomination. Her deeply felt call to preach led her to go wherever she could best pursue that call.

As Free Methodists, John and Clara Wetherald held revivals that drew hundreds and lasted for days at a time. They planted churches in what are now the North, East, and Southern Michigan conferences. In her lifetime Clara was a pioneer for women’s ministry in both Free Methodist and Congregationalist churches. □

*Sources:* *East Michigan’s Great Adventure: A History of the East Michigan Conference of the Free Methodist Church, 1884–1984*, ed. Dale Woods (Light & Life Press, 1984) contains details about Clara and John Wetherald’s ministry appointments and Clara’s brother’s appointments. Other sources: Clara Wetherald, “Dedication at Royalton, Michigan,” *The Free Methodist* (Oct. 10, 1888), 5; Clara Wetherald, “Shall Women be Ordained?” *The Free Methodist* (May 14, 1890), 2–3; reports in the 1890 *General Conference Daily*, Oct. 13 and Oct. 21; Mary Wetherald, “Mary Wetherald, South Lyon, Mich.,” *The Free Methodist* (April 11, 1888), 6; “Fell from Grace: A Result of a Clio Pastor’s Visit to Saginaw,” *Saginaw News* (Feb. 25, 1891); James Birney, *Divorce: Esther A. Miller vs. Harvey Miller*, Court Records, Saginaw County, Mich. (March 1862); Frank Miller, “Rev. Clara L. Harbridge” *The Free Methodist* (1921), 11:794–95.

## Historical Committee Adds Members; Organizes for New Quadrennium

As a new quadrennium begins, the Committee on Free Methodist History and Archives has expanded and set new directions for the years ahead.

New members on the committee are Andrea Anibal, David White, Christy Mesaros-Winkles, and Grace Yoder. Andrea works with Light & Life Communications and coordinates the denominational website. David White is a financial adviser, with deep FM roots, living in the Detroit area. Christy Mesaros-Winkles grew up in the Columbus, Ohio, FM Church and is now completing a doctoral program at Bowling State University focusing on early FM women leaders; she and her husband Andrew live in Toledo. Grace Yoder is the archivist at Asbury Theological Seminary. She and her husband Ralph are active in the Wilmore, Kentucky, Free Methodist Church.

These four bring strategic strength to the Historical Committee as we look to expand the Center’s range of ministries. Other members continuing on the committee are: Gerald Bates, David Bundy, Charles Canon, Mindi Grieser Cromwell, Barry Hamilton, John Hay, Stan Ingersol, Doug Koskela, Evelyn Mottweiler (Life Member), Howard Snyder, Richard Stephens, and Marvin Zahniser.

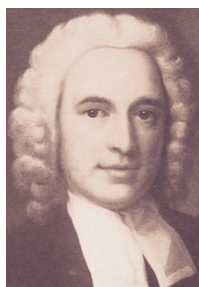
Officers for the new quadrennium are Howard Snyder, chair; Mindi Grieser Cromwell, vice chair; and Cathy Fortner, secretary. (Cathy Fortner, Center Director, and Kate McGinn, Archivist, serve on the committee by virtue of their positions with the Center.)

The Committee on Free Methodist History and Archives normally meets for a day and a half in March and again in late September or early October. Its next scheduled meeting is March 19–20, 2012. □



# Book Review

***The Lyrical Theology of Charles Wesley: A Reader***,  
by S. T. Kimbrough (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2011).  
339 pp. (paper).



The tercentenary of Charles Wesley's birth in 1707 prompted many new books and articles on "the sweet singer of Methodism." This compilation is one of the most recent.

S. T. Kimbrough, both a musician and a historian, has dedicated much of his life to studying Charles Wesley and performing his hymns. He is the founder of the Charles Wesley Society and has published several previous books on Charles.

About half of this book consists of Charles' hymns, but the long first section (nearly 100 pages) analyzes Charles' "lyrical theology," including the literary, liturgical, and historical sources Charles used.

The poetical selections are arranged in five sections: The glory of the Triune God, the grace of Jesus Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, the community of faith, and the New Heaven and New Earth.

Kimbrough writes, "So often the language of poetry allows the Mystery to be a mystery, something with which Charles Wesley seems to be more comfortable than [was] his brother John."

Other noteworthy new books on Charles are *Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley*, by John R. Tyson (Eerdmans, 2007; 356 pp.) and *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature, and Legacy*, edited by Kenneth Newport and Ted Campbell (London, UK: Epworth, 2007; 573 pp.). Tyson, professor of theology at Houghton College, had earlier published *Charles Wesley: A Reader* (1989).

The Newport and Campbell volume contains 28 essays on a wide variety of topics, from Charles' personality and family, to his shorthand method, to his theology and poetic gifts.

John and Charles Wesley both shared poetic gifts and a passion for God and the gospel. Otherwise however they were very different, and were often in conflict on the nature and role of Methodism. One comes to understand both the Methodist movement and John Wesley himself better through the lens of Charles Wesley's life, hymns, and theology.

— Howard A. Snyder

## LETTERS

### *The 1910 FM Hymnal*

I enjoyed your article in the recent Newsletter [Summer/Fall 2011] on the 1910 *Hymnal*, the one I grew up with. I still have the one my father used as song leader at Seattle First Free Methodist church for 35 years, when there were no pianos, organs or choirs. He kept a record in his hymnal of each time a hymn was used and the pastor who used it. Also there are some penciled-in solfege symbols he used in order to learn hymns that were unfamiliar to him.

Happily, I attend a church where hymns are used regularly in our "traditional" worship service, though our "contemporary" service is pulling more and more away from hymn singing. Thank you for focusing some attention on hymns.

— Bob Cathey, Seattle, Washington

I'm pleased the *Hymnal* is being reprinted. When I was teaching [church history] at Greenville, some of the students knew there were old papers in the tower of Hogue Hall, and soon showed up with them in class.

One of the items was a copy of the 1883 FM hymnbook. It had W. T. Hogue's name in it. There were notes throughout the hymnal. Some of them named tunes for this or that hymn. Beside some hymns I found the word, "Out." Eventually I concluded that it was Hogue's own copy in which he had written notes to guide the revision.

[Since the Greenville College library did not want the volume,] I kept it [as] part of my collection of Free Methodistica and holiness literature. I [eventually] gave that collection to Seattle Pacific University, along with my father's collection of Methodistica. There is a fascinating study waiting to be made on the basis of that copy!

— Stanley Walters, Upper Sandusky, Ohio

## PLANNED GIVING: THE LEGACY OF MISSIONARY KATHRYN HESSLER

Recently the Marston Memorial Historical Center received a gift of over \$1,000 from the estate of retired Free Methodist missionary Kathryn Hessler. A nurse with long service in South Africa, Kate Hessler saw the importance of preserving Free Methodist history and heritage. She went to be with the Lord on February 20, 2011, at age ninety-one.

Have you considered underwriting the future of Free Methodism's legacy through planned giving?

You can include the Marston Historical Center in your longer-range estate planning as well as current giving.

Contact the Free Methodist Foundation at 800-325-8975, or visit the FMF website at [www.fmfoundation.org](http://www.fmfoundation.org). A wide variety of giving options is available, ranging from gifts and bequests to annuities, trusts, and family foundations.