



B.T. Roberts  
(1823-93)

FREE METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# Newsletter

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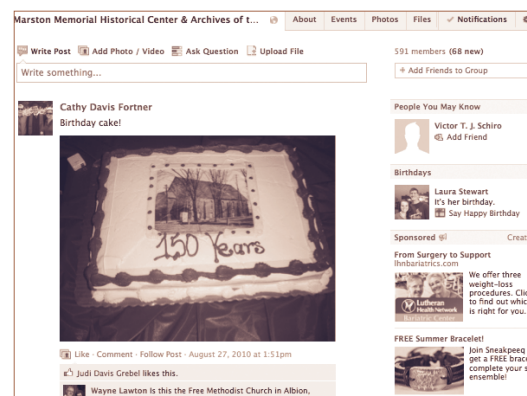
## Free Methodism's Growing Online Community

**W**hat does it mean to be Free Methodist? This is now a global Internet question! Online communication is changing the face of Free Methodist community.

Example: The new Marston Memorial Historical Center Group on Facebook already has nearly 500 members. People are posting comments and hundreds of photos to the site. Dick Leonard, for example, has uploaded a good many photos and scanned documents relating to 19th- and 20th-Century Free Methodism in the Northeast. History is online.

FM-related Internet sites are springing up around the world. Some are connected to local churches; others are linked to our educational institutions and various denominational ministries, such as Missions and Childcare. Some groups operate in languages other than English—Chinese, Spanish, and Portuguese, for instance. We have no idea how many!

We do know about these English-language Facebook groups, in addition to the Historical Center group: Free Methodist Family, Growing Up Free Methodist, FMCA Chaplains, African Heritage Network of the FMCUSA, Free Methodist Urban Fellowship. There are also groups



### Marston Memorial Historical Center on Facebook

like Classic Spring Arbor that focus on other aspects of our heritage.

A new Chinese-language group in Taiwan is called Christian China FMC, while another group is connected with Holy Light Seminary in Kaohsiung. Chris Payk, a Canadian Free Methodist, reported from Taiwan: "I know of five Internet discussion groups in Taiwan that are closely related to the Free Methodist Church, but there are many church websites and likely many more that I do not know of."

The situation is similar in other countries. ►►

## Marston Historical Center Renovation and Expansion

A proposal from the architectural development firm InterDesign in Indianapolis to renovate and expand the Marston Historical Center has received positive response from our History Advisory Strategy Group and from the denominational Board of Administration.

We hope to begin the first phase of this

project in coming months. This involves moving archival storage into larger space at the World Ministries Center, thus permitting the expansion of the Hugh A. White Memorial Library and other improvements.

We will have an update in the next issue of the Newsletter. □

# robb historical centre Riches

The Robb Historical Centre near Thamesford, Ontario, preserves a surprising amount of important material on Free Methodist history. Holdings include numerous one-of-a-kind documents on Free Methodism not only in Canada, but worldwide.

The James A. and T. Ora Robb Historical Centre occupies a heated and air-conditioned cottage at Maple Grove Christian

Retreat Centre, one of Canadian Free Methodism's historic campgrounds. The Centre was opened in 1987 under the sponsorship of the former Great Lakes Conference. It is one of the denomination's best organized and most comprehensive conference or regional historical centers. The Centre is located about 100 miles west of Toronto, not far from London and the 401 expressway, and just south of Thamesford.

The work of the Robb Centre is coordinated by Mrs. Doris Withenshaw, librarian and treasurer, of Sarnia, Ontario, and a committee consisting of Mrs. Marilyn Kerr (chair), Trevor Stevens (secretary), Rev. John Knoll, Donna Gage, Bob Campbell, Bradley Medel, and Mrs. Withenshaw.

## Rich Treasures

I was pleasantly surprised to find at the Robb Centre the personal journals of pioneer missionary J. W. Haley, as well as the archives of Lorne Park College. This fine FM school operated at Port Credit, Ontario, from 1924 to 1966. Its legacy continues today in the lives of many former students and through the Lorne Park Foundation.

Some of the materials at the Robb Centre date back well over a century, such as a poster advertising an 1891 camp meeting near London. The Centre's archives include information on FM bishops and superintendents, pastoral appointments, local church histories, and a variety of rare books and periodicals. A wide range of photos and memorabilia is on display.

The Centre's typescript Accession Record documenting over 1,600 separate items is now being digitized by Donna Gage. In digital form it can be made accessible at the Marston Memorial Historical Center as well as online globally.

Since the Canadian Free Methodist Church became a General Conference in 1990 separate from U. S. Free Methodism, these two branches of the church have had less interaction. For over a century both branches were part of the Free Methodist Church of North America. For this reason, many records of the Free Methodist Church in Canada, including conference and local church histories, are archived at the Marston Memorial Historical Center in Indianapolis.



**Top to Bottom:**  
Historical Committee for the Robb Centre: Trevor Stevens, Marilyn Kerr, Doris Withenshaw, John Knoll, with Howard Snyder. (Missing from photo: Donna Gage, Bob Campbell, Bradley Medel.); Robb Historical Centre cottage; Interior of Robb Historical Centre, which opens to the room housing missionary records from Rev. and Mrs. John Wesley Haley and others.



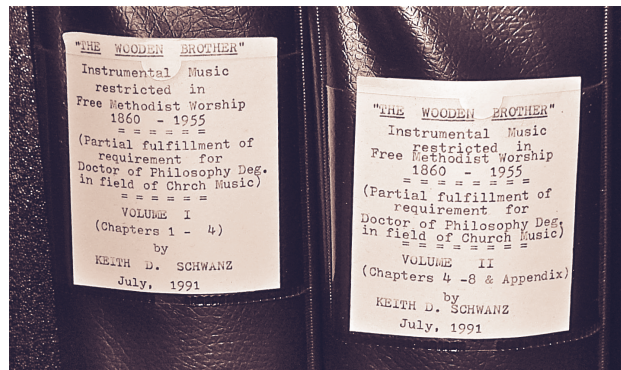


## Global Access

It is important now to connect the Marston Center with the Robb Centre and other Canadian repositories of church records. This interlinking is essential because records in one location may not be available — or even known — at others.

The Free Methodist Ministry Centre in Mississauga, Ontario (greater Toronto area) houses important records of the Holiness Movement Church in Canada, which merged with the Free Methodist Church in 1959. The Robb Centre at Thamesford has records of Canadian missionaries and leaders who served the denomination globally. The Robb Centre contains, for example, several books written or edited by Canadian FM Bishop Charles V. Fairbairn.

Western Ontario Free Methodists have done an outstanding job of collecting and preserving our history. Now, with today's Internet capabilities, we hope to link together the various repositories of FM history and heritage, creating a global virtual Free Methodist Historical Center. □



**Left to Right:** The Centre houses a copy of Keith Schwanz's 1991 Ph.D. dissertation on "The Wooden Brother," about earlier Free Methodist restrictions on instrumental music; Poster for 1891 Free Methodist camp meeting near London, Ontario.



## Free Methodism's Growing Online Community (Continued)

There are also Free Methodist networks or groups on other Internet portals, such as Twitter and LinkedIn.

If you have Internet access, check out some of these sites. Most are easily located through a Google search.

Will such online communities redefine what it means to be Free Methodist? Until now, FM membership has been defined mostly by conference and local church. But online communities reach across these boundaries, as well as those of nation and native language. Only God knows where this will lead, but this expansion of contacts can have many positive effects.

What would Bishop L. R. Marston think? Internet community was unimaginable when he founded the Historical Center in the 1960s. This is a new challenge for the Marston Memorial Historical Center, and we're already working on it. □

## the QUOTABLE Roberts

Rivers that flow into the ocean reach it, no matter from what high grounds they may come, on a level with it. Their waters run into the ocean and the waters of the ocean run into them. [So also with us; if your life] is going out towards God, his life will come into yours and you will become more and more like him, until at last you are swallowed up in the ocean of infinite love.

— B. T. Roberts, "Editorial Notes,"  
The Free Methodist (Oct. 17, 1888), 1.

▷ **HELP US SAVE FREE METHODIST HISTORY** — Contributions can now be made to the Marston Memorial Center through its website. Currently we list two giving categories — one for the Center's programs and operations, and the other for the FM History Futures fund to secure the Center's long-term future. Go to this link, then click the "Give" button: <http://fmcusa.org/historical>. Checks can be sent directly to the Marston Memorial Historical Center, and Planned Giving support can be arranged through the Free Methodist Foundation.

▷ **PASTORS' SABBATICAL PROGRAM** applications are now available. Contact the Historical Center for information on scholarships and scheduling.

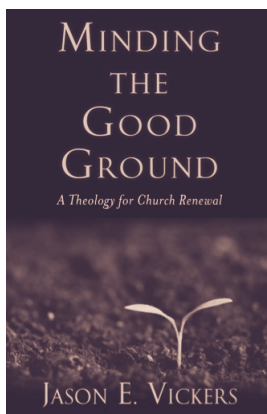
▷ **NEW ACQUISITIONS:** Photos of the new archival room at Seattle First FM Church (contributed by Norma Cathey), and a video clip of the opening service at Roberts Memorial FMC in Washington, D.C., in 1947 (sent by Marti Theune, Acts 12:24 Churches historian).

▷ **EXTRA COPIES** of the Newsletter are available free of charge upon request (up to ten copies to one address). If you wish to send current or back issues to friends or family, contact the Historical Center by phone or letter or by email at [History@fmcusa.org](mailto:History@fmcusa.org).

News & Notes

# Book Review

***Minding the Good Ground: A Theology for Church Renewal***, by Jason E. Vickers (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011). 151 pp (paper).



Recent years have seen a new flurry of interest in church renewal. This interest has been accompanied by a wide array of proposals for renewal from all corners of the church. In *Minding the Good Ground*, Jason Vickers offers a theological vision of the church aimed at helping us understand and evaluate various renewal movements. His primary emphasis is that renewal is ultimately the work of God, not the result of human ingenuity.

Vickers, a United Methodist, is associate professor of theology and

Wesleyan studies at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.

The author develops his argument in three chapters. The first grounds the nature of the church in its origin at Pentecost. In this light, the church should be understood as a community “whose life depends entirely on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.” Because the church is dependent on God’s power rather than our own, Vickers suggests that the first crucial step toward renewal is tarrying together in prayer.

In the second chapter, Vickers offers a twofold account of the mission of the church. The first dimension of the church’s mission is to worship the triune God in humility, thanksgiving, and praise. Second, the church is called to bear witness to Jesus Christ in word and deed throughout the world. The community of faith can thus evaluate various proposals in light of a basic ques-

tion: Will this enable the church more faithfully to worship the Holy Trinity and more effectively to bear witness to Jesus Christ?

The sacramental life of the church is explored in the third chapter. Vickers suggests that the church has too often focused on increasing attendance numbers or cultural influence as the goal of renewal. In contrast, he argues that long-haul renewal depends on initiating people into that which God can uniquely offer: the fullness of salvation, transformation, and healing. Envisioning the church as a hospital, he describes the persons, practices, and materials of the Christian heritage as the “medicine of the Holy Spirit” by which people are immersed into the life of God.

Part of the beauty of this book is that Vickers does not offer simply another program or proposal for renewal. Rather, he calls us to remember that the church’s vitality depends on the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit, who can work generously through any number of structures or means. With that theological conviction in place, one can then assess specific renewal movements by placing them in a larger framework of God’s work in the world.

This volume offers rich reading for church leaders and in fact for all Christians interested in the present and future of the church.

— Douglas M. Koskela, *Seattle Pacific University*

## LETTERS

As you know, I pick books from the Historical Center that might be of value for our leaders in Asia. In my recent travels I have given *A History of Missions from Christ to William Carey*, a three-volume *History of Methodism*, B. T. Roberts’ *Fishers of Men*, and the story of Jacob DeShazer.

When well placed, these books clearly have an impact in shaping and giving perspective to emerging Free Methodist ministries and leaders.

— David Yardy, *Asia Area Director*,  
*Free Methodist World Missions*

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