

FREE METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

SPRING 2015 — Volume 14, No. 6



B.T. Roberts
(1823-93)

Published by the
**Marston Memorial
Historical Center**
ISSN 1546-4199

Cathy (Fortner) Robling,
Director
Julianne Class, Archivist
Kyle Moran, Digital Librarian

World Ministries Center
770 N High School Road
Indianapolis, IN 46214
(800) 342-5531

E-mail: history@fmcusa.org

Website:
<http://fmcusa.org/historical>

Editorial Committee

Christy Mesaros-Winckles
(Editor)
Andrew Winckles
(Copy Editor)
Howard Snyder
Cathy (Fortner) Robling
Doug Koskela
Julianne Class

Layout & Design

Erin Eckberg

A Focus on Spiritual Freedom

BY CHRISTY MESAROS-WINCKLES, EDITOR

Free Methodism was founded in 1860 on four key “freedom” principles — free pews, freedom from slavery, freedom from secret societies, and freedom of the Spirit — principles oriented towards embracing *all*, without distinctions based on race, class, or gender.

Despite the denomination’s pre-Civil War abolitionist stance and post-Civil War attempt to welcome black brothers and sisters into the Free Methodist Church, the denomination remained relatively undiversified during the Reconstruction Era due to limited success in planting churches in the South. Other holiness denominations were more successful in their endeavors, such as the Wesleyan Methodists. Yet, it would take the 1906 Azusa Street Revival for the revival fire of the holiness/Pentecostal movement to truly penetrate the South. However, Free Methodist evangelists such as Adelia Arnold did not let the lack of holiness revivalism in the South disturb her. As Greg Coates’ research on Arnold illustrates, she was a woman who worked tirelessly to share the gospel. While Arnold was an active and well known Free Methodist evangelist in her day, her work has largely gone unrecognized in Free Methodist histories.

Her daughter Helen Arnold published *Under Southern Skies: Reminiscences of the Life of Mrs. Adelia Arnold*, a biography of her mother, in 1924. Outside of the biography, Arnold’s story has been buried in the Free Methodist archives. As you read Coates’ research on Arnold, note

that not only was she fearless in breaking down racial barriers but, like many women evangelists of the time period, she sacrificed a stable family life to share the gospel.

Arnold was controversial but passionate about her faith — something that I often think is missing from 21st century holiness culture — displaying a willingness to be radical in the face of cultural pressure (even *within* the denomination) to conform to prevailing ideals of the culture. Let’s not forget the radical roots we came from where individuals like Arnold were unafraid to cross racial lines in the Reconstruction South. □



WHOLE CHURCH
LOVE GOD | LOVE PEOPLE | MAKE DISCIPLES

LUNCHEONS | JUL 13-16 | GC15

The Marston Historical Center will host four luncheons at the Free Methodist General Conference in Orlando, July 13-16.

Topics for the luncheon presentations:
Free Methodist Quartets, Bible Quizzers,
Global Free Methodist History, and Free
Methodist Historical Society, with updates
on the work of the Historical Center.

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.

Adelia Arnold

RADICALLY EMBRACING RACIAL EQUALITY

| BY GREGORY COATES |

On April 24, 1906, a brief news item appeared in the back pages of *The New York Times*, “Pastor Seeks Divorce: Rockefeller Church Minister Says Wife Joined Colored Community.” Irwin R. B. Arnold, husband to the diminutive and fiery Adelia Arnold, had accepted an appointment at a prestigious Baptist Church in Cleveland, Ohio, a church financially supported by the oil baron J. D. Rockefeller. As Irwin chased after the respectability of high society in Cleveland, his Free Methodist wife Adelia choose to live in a small fellowship of impoverished black Christians on Chicago’s Southside. Both Irwin and Adelia, as well as their five adult daughters, lamented the dissolution of the thirty-nine year marriage, yet it was clear that God was calling both to radically different forms of ministry. In a sense, their divorce illustrates the larger tensions within Methodism at the beginning of the twentieth century, a time when mainline Methodists sought the path of upward mobility and social relevance while the holiness denominations insisted upon simplicity, frugality, and ministry to society’s marginalized.

Adelia Arnold, formerly Adelia Nichols, was born on March 11, 1845, in DeKalb County, Illinois, to abolitionist parents, who would become charter members of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection. Throughout Adelia’s childhood, her father, Ira Nichols, in violation of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, operated an illegal station along the Underground Railroad, covertly transporting and hiding numerous fugitive slaves as they made the treacherous journey to Canada in search of freedom. Adelia, who was described as a “sharp, mature, impressionable... [and] extremely sensitive child,”¹ witnessed her father’s willingness to practice civil disobedience at great personal risk for the cause of justice.

Throughout these early years near Brush Point, Illinois, the runaway slaves Adelia met in her parents’ home inflamed within her a loathing for the injustice of slavery. At an early age, she sensed a desire to devote her life to working on behalf of racial reconciliation and spreading the gospel to southern blacks. Strong willed, intensely intellectual, deeply spiritual, and inflamed with a passionate love for those on the margins, Adelia soon developed a reputation as a natural leader during her young adult years.

In 1867, shortly after marrying Irwin R. B. Arnold, brother of Free Methodist Publisher T. B. Arnold, Adelia and her family set off in a raft down the Mississippi River for the purpose of ministering to recently emancipated Southern slaves. Traveling on a small, self-made “cabin-boat,” which they named “The Exhibitor,” which was equipped with nothing more than a tent and canvass seats, the Arnold family would make frequent stops in small villages and towns to preach the gospel and care for



MRS. ADELIA ARNOLD



◀ I.R.B. Arnold's Floating Chapel. Image originally appeared in *The River Mission* September 14, 1892, Vol. 1, No.3

the physical needs of black women and children. Throughout the journey, Adelia would take every opportunity available to visit schoolhouses or any other places where African-American children would gather, in order to share with them the good news of the holiness message. After their mission-boat eventually arrived in Louisiana, it was then tugged back north on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, by a steamboat called the *Joseay*, completing a remarkable journey of 1,600 miles at the end of May in 1889. In a remarkable

happenstance of history, Adelia recorded in her diary the very evening after their family's safe arrival in Pittsburgh, "The river rose thirteen feet... caused by the breaking of a dam at Johnstown, eighty-six miles above."

After this first mission down and up the Mississippi River, Adelia led her family on several more similar missionary expeditions. On one such journey in 1892, a storm nearly capsized their small raft and the family narrowly escaped with their lives. Yet Adelia's mission remained undeterred. Later, while in Mississippi, Adelia and her daughters happened upon a grave marking a tragic event. Adelia's daughter Julia Arnold Shelhamer decades later recalls the event:

On this beautiful packet steamer that plied those waters carrying freight and passengers, there worked a colored "roust-a-bout" with a large number of white men. A barrel of oranges was broken open and the men as they passed by helped themselves. After the rest of them had partaken, the colored man also ventured to take one. This enraged one of the white men who picked up a hammer and knocked him in the head. He fell over and lay dead upon the deck. The captain ordered a grave dug and the men dumped the warm limp body of the poor colored man in, boots and all just as he was, without any ceremony or prayer... Whether he was entirely dead when he was buried, had never been really known.²

Upon finding this grave and hearing the story of what had taken place there, Adelia and her five daughters held a funeral service and built a tombstone. They left together, according to Julia, "Praying that we might do something for the uplifting of the colored race, as there is no redress in the courts for such as this man..."³

Late in her life, when age and health prevented her from such a rigorous life on the river, Adelia settled in a small black village outside of Atlanta, Georgia, where she and her children founded and operated a Bible school. While there, Adelia worked tirelessly even in her old age, visiting prisoners, tending to the sick, and preaching to the crowds that would gather to hear the small, fiery evangelist. Committed to absolute equality, Adelia broke with Southern tradition by always speaking to her black brothers and sisters with titles of respect, using "Mister" and "Misses" rather than calling them by first names. On one occasion, Adelia organized and preached at a racially integrated holiness tent meeting, angering the local white townsfolk.

The runaway slaves Adelia met in her parents' home inflamed within her a loathing for the injustice of slavery. At an early age, she sensed a desire to devote her life to working on behalf of racial reconciliation and spreading the gospel to southern blacks.

Forming a mob, the furious white Georgians who were intent on maintaining racial purity attacked the tent meeting, and Adelia barely escaped with her life.⁴

Adelia Arnold passed away on July 2, 1916, in the black community outside of Atlanta where she had devoted the last years of her life. In typical Free Methodist fashion, she insisted her coffin be built at minimal expense so more money could go toward "Furthering the gospel, especially among the Africans."⁵ Georgia law would not permit her to be buried in a cemetery with non-whites nor for non-whites to attend her funeral, but she was secretly visited by several from the black community and mourned by hundreds of others in the region upon her death. □

¹ Glen Williamson, *Julia: Giantess in Generosity; the Story of Julia Arnold Shelhamer* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1969), 13.

² *Under Southern Skies: Reminiscences in the Life of Adelia Arnold*, 84.

³ *Under Southern Skies: Reminiscences in the Life of Adelia Arnold*, 85-86.

⁴ Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South*, 46.

⁵ *Under Southern Skies: Reminiscences in the Life of Adelia Arnold*, 51.

▷ CONGRATULATIONS to Cathy (Fortner) Robling, Marston Memorial Historical Center Director, who married James Robling in December 2014!

▷ The Marston Historical Center has received a generous gift of \$12,500 from the White Foundation to digitize the catalog of the Historical Center's unique FM History library and to enhance the Center in other ways.

▷ Marston Historical Society extends its sympathies to the families of Bishop Robert F. Andrews and Rev. Robert Haslam. Andrews served on the CFMH&A from October 1995 through October 1999, and Haslam was the initial editor of the FMHS Newsletter and husband of Frances Haslam, former director of the Marston Memorial Historical Center 1988-1997.

▷ FM Historical Society T-shirts are still available! To order call 1-800-342-5531 or e-mail history@fmcusa.org. \$15 + S&H. Available sizes include youth lg, sm, med, lg, xl, and 2xl

Book Review

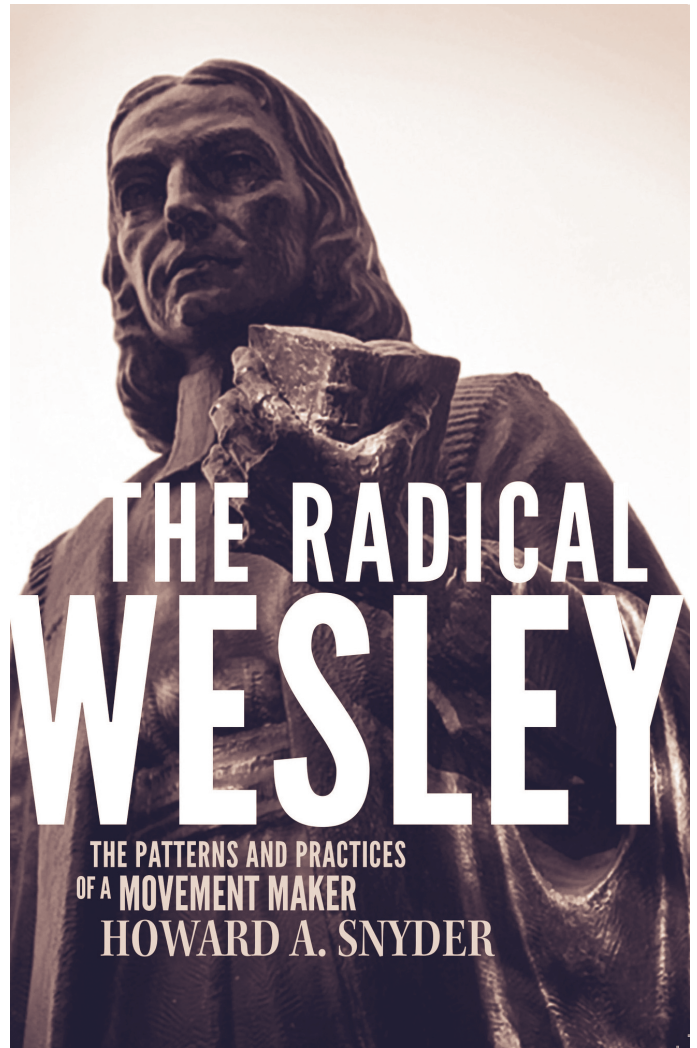
The Radical Wesley: The Patterns and Practices of a Movement Maker by Howard A. Snyder. Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2014. ISBN 978-1-62824-087-0

In an updated edition of *The Radical Wesley* Howard Snyder closely examines John Wesley from a developmental perspective, asking if Methodism's founder succeeds in his quest to restore "radical Christianity and radical discipleship within the established Church" (p. xv).

The book sets forth a "mediating model" of church renewal that combines the institutional view and the charismatic view of the church, preserving both the historic forms of Christianity and making room for the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit in reviving and energizing the people of God. These two roles have at times conflicted, with the institutional church driving out charismatic forms of renewal and charismatic movements breaking away and veering toward heresy. Yet, as Snyder points out, early Methodism makes an ideal "mediating model" in this respect, when Wesley refused to leave the Church of England, he sought to widen the established church with authentic, scriptural Christianity through Methodism. Although he regarded the Church of England as languishing, Wesley never pronounced it dead and urged the Methodists to remain faithful to her.

For church leaders, the most valuable part of *The Radical Wesley* may be Snyder's ten "Marks of a Mediating Model." Snyder helps today's leaders recognize biblically-authentic church renewal as well as the dangers of pragmatism. He calls for renewal grounded in scriptural Christianity and faithful discipleship, a call for the church to forsake its idolatry of success and yield to the renewing agency of the Spirit.

— Barry W. Hamilton



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Free Methodist Church – USA
Free Methodist Historical Society
770 N High School Road
Indianapolis, IN 46214
(800) 342-5531

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Indianapolis, IN
Permit No. 8783