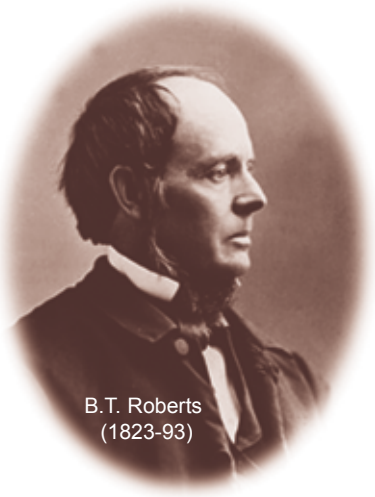


FREE METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Editorial Introduction

This month we focus on the contributions of the Ashcraft family, particularly how the family helped share Free Methodism with the West Coast of the United States and their importance in influencing the founding of not just one but two Free Methodist Universities- Greenville and Seattle Pacific. I am extremely thankful to the Overholt, Cranston and Kline families for sharing their family legacy with the Marston

Historical Center. In my own research on the family I came across an article written by Adelaide Beers about the ministry of Franklin Ashcraft in the St. Louis area. I can think of no better way to begin the newsletter than with allowing us to jump back in time and see their ministry in action.

— *Dr. Christy Mesaros-Winckles, Editor*

At East St. Louis

BY MRS. ADELAIDE L. BEERS

We reached this place Saturday morning, June 28, 1890. We found G.Q.M. {General Quarterly Meeting} of the Belleville District in progress. The meeting was held by the chairman, F. H. Ashcraft, who had evidently tarried until endued with power. The preachers on the district also came filled with faith and the Spirit. The first service we were in was Saturday evening, which was well attended, not withstanding the uncomfortably warm weather. The heat seemed unendurable, but refreshing breezes were sent from heaven. Every service began with earnest prayer, in which all joined in supplicating until the Spirit was given. We very soon felt at home, although coming a stranger.

There is only a small band of pilgrims in East Saint Louis, but these are blessed and free and willing to sacrifice much to see the work move. Brother Ashcraft preached in a pointed, forcible manner, attended with Divine unction. One can easily see that he hews to the line, and is on the no compromise track.

Sunday morning love-feast was usually good. There was no waiting for testimonies. It seemed that the saints were just waiting for a chance to get in a clear, positive testimony of entire holiness. The power and glory rested on the saints. Following the love feast, Brother Ashcraft preached a powerful sermon on holiness and several identified themselves as seekers of this blessing. After the sermon Sunday evening the altar was soon filled with seekers for pardon or purity.

An old man past sixty was clearly saved. A little girl of eleven years came forward of her own accord, and was soon rejoicing in Jesus; then her mother pushed her way through the kneeling crowd and began to cry for mercy. She said she had not been to a religious meeting for many years, and only came because the little girl begged her to. Several were sanctified, and the meeting closed with clean victory. Praise the Lord!

— *The Earnest Christian Sept. 1890 Vol LV issue 3*

Henry and Franklin Ashcraft

BY KNELDRITH (KAY) KLINE & MIRIAM (KLINE) OVERHOLT

Henry and Franklin Ashcraft were blood relatives near the same age, converted near the same time who shared a defining purpose to spread “scriptural holiness” throughout the west coast of the United States. Later as Free Methodists both were influential in the Illinois Conferences of the Free Methodist Church and in the founding of Free Methodist colleges.

GUILT AND DISILLUSION

Henry Ashcraft was born in 1849 in Schuyler County, Illinois. He was a farm boy, the son of pioneer Richard Ashcraft. Six years later, also in Schuyler County, Franklin Ashcraft was born, a grandson to Richard. In response to Abraham Lincoln’s plea for new recruits to shore up the Union forces during the latter part of the Civil War, Henry enlisted in the Union Army Company I of the 64th Illinois infantry in February of 1864. Although only fifteen years of age, he was accepted as a regular

soldier and fought in a series of bloody battles before taking part in the siege of Atlanta and the brutal march of General Sherman’s army “From Atlanta to the Sea”. After the war Henry, decorated for bravery, but angry and emotionally traumatized, returned to his home neighborhood in rural Illinois.

Before her death, Araminta (Minnie) Ashcraft, Henry’s wife, confided to her grand-daughter, Kneldrith (Kay) Kline, that Henry would never talk of his march with General Sherman’s army. It had been a bloody, destructive time and the entire war had left him guilt-ridden and disillusioned. After returning to Illinois he began to drink and carouse with other veteran soldiers in an attempt to wipe out painful war memories. While drinking together they often rode their horses around the area looking for camp meetings and churches to harass. They sometimes circled the perimeter of a camp meeting tent while shooting their guns into the air, shouting invectives and even cutting tent ropes to break up the meetings.

REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION

Henry’s granddaughter, Kay Kline, recalls hearing the following story of his conversion related to her by B.C. Johnson, an elderly Free Methodist pastor who remembered the event:

One night out of curiosity Henry Ashcraft stepped into a camp meeting tent and sat to listen at the rear. The preaching was powerful, and God’s Spirit was at work.

When the altar call was given Henry fell to the floor under conviction and, nearly helpless from the burden of guilt and sin, crawled his way to the altar. There he wept his way to repentance and forgiveness.

The experience of conversion and later of entire sanctification wrought a 180-degree change in the life of this young Civil War veteran.

PIONEER EVANGELISTS

Henry Ashcraft soon experienced a compelling call to tell others of his experience and teamed up with his relative, Franklin Ashcraft, to begin an evangelism ministry. Franklin proved to be a powerful partner as well as a long-range influence in persuading souls to seek both forgiveness and the second “work of grace” called variously “holiness,” “perfect love,” or “entire sanctification.”

The mission of these two men was “to spread scriptural holiness” to the West Coast. Ashcraft letters and diaries confirm that holiness was seen by the Ashcrafts and other “pre-Free Methodists” as a distinct second work of grace after conversion. That truth, however was not being generally recognized, preached nor much practiced among Methodists on the West Coast.

The Ashcrafts traveled westward across the United States by wagon, rail, stage coach, even by bob sled preaching the gospel wherever they could get a hearing. God’s Spirit was



upon them, and their ministry bore fruit as their path led them to Texas in 1877, California in 1880, and to Oregon and Washington Territory in 1881.

CONVERSION OF FUTURE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT

In 1881 while the Ashcrafts were laboring in southern California, God answered the prayer of pioneer farmers near Gresham, Oregon and led the Ashcrafts north to hold revival meetings in the Washington and Oregon Territories. In her biography of Alexander Beers, later the first president of Seattle Pacific College, Adelaide Beers quotes Beers as follows:

An old gentleman by the name of Rugg had spent years in faithful prayer that God might visit the new neighborhood... He heard of the successful evangelistic preachers, Franklin and Henry Ashcraft, then laboring in California...Rugg owned two pairs of very fine oxen that he had purchased to use in clearing the land...He placed a chattel mortgage on his oxen without hesitation and the evangelists came...the meetings were successful from the beginning.

Alexander Beers recalls that in one of the early meetings in a schoolhouse near Gresham (Oregon)

The word of God pierced my heart as a sword...(and) I made for the altar with all possible haste. I had no sooner knelt...until I was made divinely conscious that my sins were all taken away and that I was a child of God.

After his conversion and call to ministry Beers would go on to become a founder of Seattle Pacific College and to serve as its first president.

FREE EVANGELISTS TO FREE METHODISTS

The Ashcrafts were preaching as free evangelists though Henry held an exhorter's license from the Quincy District of the Illinois Conference of the Methodist Church issued in 1877. Neither was ordained, but both Franklin and Henry aligned themselves with west-coast believers who subscribed to the holiness doctrines and who later coalesced to form the California, Oregon and Washington Conferences of the Free Methodist Church.

In 1882, Henry returned for a time to Illinois where Free Methodism was gathering strength and organization. There he formally joined the Free Methodist Church and was ordained deacon by the Central Illinois Conference. That same year he was married to Araminta (Minnie) Evans, a young Free Methodist lay worker.

In 1883 they set out together with a new baby girl to evangelize again in the Washington/Oregon Territory. Franklin, had also married, joined the Free Methodist Church and with his wife, Carrie, moved west to evangelize with Henry.

EVANGELISTS TO PASTORS

God continued to bless the Ashcraft labors and scores were justified and sanctified. It was a time of change and within two years, Henry and Minnie returned to Illinois. There he took pastoral appointments and served for thirteen years in the Central Illinois Conference until his retirement and death in 1901. Franklin also returned to Illinois where he remarried and became well-known as a preacher and conference leader. Both Ashcrafts were active members of the Central Illinois Conference.

Franklin Ashcraft was a major figure in the founding of Greenville College in 1892 and was elected the first president of its Board of Trustees. Mae Tenney's history of the College, *Still Abides the Memory*, reads:

F.H. Ashcraft, president of the first Board of Trustees... and of later boards as well, and financial agent at various intervals over a period of thirty-two years was the dynamic person...whose optimism led Wilson Hogue to his initial decision (to accept the College presidency)... and brought to every undertaking connected with the College like staunch support.

COMMON FARMERS — UNCOMMON HARVEST

Henry and Franklin Ashcraft were both born in rural Schuyler County Illinois and both died in the same farm county. Yet, in a time when travel was dangerous and difficult, these young



Central Illinois conference, 1890. Franklin is highlighted on the left and Henry is on the right.

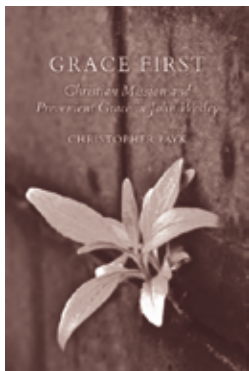
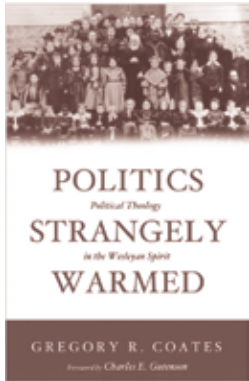
men spread the gospel of wholeness and holiness over much of the western and central United States. Though self-taught men with little formal education, their lives had been so changed by the gospel that they were able to give staunch support to the founding of two Free Methodist institutions of higher education which remain to this day: Seattle Pacific University and Greenville College. □

▷ THE FREE METHODIST ARCHIVE DEDICATION was held on Friday, April 10, 2015. The archive is named in honor of Evelyn Marston Mottweiler for her outstanding service in the development of the Marston Memorial Historical Center. Evelyn served as Executive Secretary of the MMHC 1971-1988. Family and close friends enjoyed a nice luncheon with Evelyn and the Committee on Free Methodist History and Archives (CFMHA). In 1988 Evelyn was granted a lifetime membership to this committee by the Board of Administration (BOA)

Book Review

Gregory R. Coates, *Politics Strangely Warmed: Political Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2015. xvii + 71 pp.

Christopher Payk, *Grace First: Christian Mission and Prevenient Grace in John Wesley*. Toronto: Clements Academic, 2015. 108 pp.



Here are two significant books by younger Free Methodist scholars. Both are brief, which I view as a plus.

Politics Strangely Warmed, by Greg Coates, is an investigation of John Wesley's "political theology"—that is, his understanding of church and gospel in relation to society and particularly government. *Grace First* is a fresh examination of John Wesley's doctrine of "prevenient" or "preventing" grace, that attracting love-in-action of God that precedes or goes before any human turning to God.

Both authors are ordained elders in the Free Methodist Church. Payk, a Canadian, with his family is currently pastoring in Taiwan and pursuing further theological studies. Coates is a doctoral student at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary (Northwestern University) in Evanston, Illinois. Both these books are based on masters theses, Payk's at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, and Coates' at Duke Divinity School. (Full

disclosure: I was Chris Payk's Th.M. supervisor at Tyndale and have occasionally dialogued with Greg Coates about his work. I encouraged Chris to publish his book because of its significance and assisted in the editing.)

Politics Strangely Warmed is actually a comparison of Wesley's and B. T. Roberts' political views and actions. This is a useful approach. Many have written about Wesley's views, but by comparing them with Roberts', Coates both clarifies Wesley's thinking and acting and shows that B. T. Roberts' views were themselves significant and are still relevant. Roberts insisted that politics and economics are moral issues, Coates notes, and engaged "in political activism against an economic system that

marginalized the people under his care"—that is, the early Free Methodists (citing in particular Roberts' surprising role in founding the Farmers' Alliance and thus in the rise of reforming Populism).

In his remarkable *First Lessons on Money*, Roberts "not only offers advice to individual families about how to make and save money, but also addresses larger structural issues such as the banking system and money supply," Coates notes. "Here Roberts is building on the foundation laid by Wesley, but using the tools available to him in his own day to expand upon Wesley's theological project" (38). Like Wesley, Roberts refused to be distracted by end-times theories—particularly, in Roberts' case, the rising tide of premillennialism that swept many Evangelical leaders into the escapist views that are still popular today and are easily manipulated for political ends. Roberts was also concerned about growing income disparity in the U.S., which he felt citizens should pressure Congress to address.

Grace First: Christian Mission and Prevenient Grace in John Wesley is a timely book. Payk does four things: He explains the roots of the doctrine of God's preceding grace in the centuries before Wesley. He shows how Wesley picked up the theme and drew out its practical meaning in Christian experience and in God's larger mission. Payk then carefully examines previous studies of Wesley's views of prevenient grace. Finally and importantly, in his last chapter, "Prevenient Grace and Mission Today," Payk draws out a range of insights for today's church. For example: Prevenient grace assures us that the Holy Spirit is always several steps ahead of us, especially as we attempt to witness for Jesus Christ in local or cross cultural contexts. And it helps us interpret the actual good that non-Christians may do (art, music, creation care, and so on). In sum, Payk shows that God's infinite graciousness is not a dusty doctrine from the past but a truth of pointed relevance today as the gospel confronts a vast and varied array of global religions and cultures.

Both books make important contributions to Wesleyan theology and especially to faithful Christian mission. In the U.S. scene, Coates' book will be the more controversial because it dares to delve into politics. But this must be done, carefully, selectively, and judiciously, as both Wesley and Roberts show us. Coates at times over-interprets Roberts, I think, ascribing to him a more developed political theology than the sources warrant. For example, Roberts never really developed the idea of the "political image" aspect of the image of God in humans. But these are matters that should be discussed.

Finally, it is worth noting that both books take Scripture and history seriously and are explicitly Trinitarian.

— Howard A. Snyder, Wilmore, Kentucky

UNDERWRITE FREE METHODIST LEGACY THROUGH PLANNED GIVING

You are needed to help preserve Free Methodist history and mission. Consider leaving a legacy through gift planning. Include the Marston Historical Center in your 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. A wide variety of giving options is available, ranging from gifts and bequests to annuities, trusts, and family foundations.