

B.T. Roberts
(1823-93)

FREE METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

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The Marston Memorial Historical Center Then and Now

The Marston Memorial Historical Center (MMHC) has a long history of preserving artifacts and documents important to Free Methodist history. Now, MMHC is taking steps to ensure Free Methodist history is also preserved in digital form, partnering with Asbury Seminary to digitize historical Free Methodist books and make them available online as well as digitizing the card catalog of the White Library located in MMHC. This will also be an online resource that will benefit researchers both inside and outside of the church. Fundraising is underway for the future redesign of the Marston Memorial Historical Center space that includes expansion of the library, and creating office space, a 1910 replica chapel and new display area where visitors can interactively learn about the history of the FMC.

The vision of MMHC's founder Bishop Leslie R. Marston was to make the library and archives a place for scholars and practitioners from all areas of the world. At the beginning, Bishop Marston donated his personal library of Methodist and Free Methodist Historical books, documents and memorabilia. The collection has grown into one of the most well regarded Wesleyan collections in the United States. Traveling to England a number of times, Bishop Marston obtained rare and valuable additions to the growing collection. Acquisitions beyond the original collection have continued for the past 52 years. Retired ministers' libraries and personal papers of bishops and other church leaders have been donated. Many historical photos are also featured from the founding of the Free Methodist Church to present.

Bishop Marston held directorship of the MMHC from 1960 to 1974. His daughter, Mrs. Evelyn Mottweiler, assisted him and then served as director from 1974 to 1988. Upon her retirement, Mrs. Frances Haslam became director from 1988 to 1997, including overseeing moving the entire collection from Winona Lake to Indianapolis, Indiana. Upon her retirement and continuing to the present, Cathy Robling has directed the MMHC.

If you wish to visit MMHC it is located inside the World Ministries Center at 770 North High School Road in Indianapolis. You are needed to help preserve Free Methodist history and mission. Consider leaving a legacy

through donating items of significant historical value, becoming a member, or if you would like to visit the Center for research or for a guided tour, please contact Cathy Robling, MMHC's director at (800) 342-5531 or e-mail her at history@fmcusa.org.

News & Notes

- International visitors: This summer Bishop Samuel Kayinamura (Rwanda) spent time researching the 75 year FMC history in Rwanda. Bishop Hawkins Mugaya (Kenya) conducted research on the FMC in Kenya and Burundi. They both appreciated gaining access to archival material. Bishop Samuel stated "It is amazing to find some pictures of the earlier beginning of the FMC in Rwanda. I know now where we came from. ... I am proud of the work done by our first missionaries."
- We are thankful for Charley Canon, a Roberts Wesleyan College retiree, volunteering time to assist with digitizing the White Library card catalog. Once the catalog is available online, researchers across the globe will be able to access this resource.
- There are new additions to the resource page of our website. You can now download *The Timothy Lessons* and *Decision to Discipleship*. <http://fmcusa.org/historical/resources/discipleship-materials/>
- In this issue a second review of Geordan Hammond's book *John Wesley in America: Restoring Primitive Christianity* is shared by Free Methodist scholar Dr. Howard Snyder.



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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.

Methodist and Abolition: A look back at the 19th Century

BY DR. CHRISTY MESAROS-WINCKLES

WITH HELP FROM THE REV. CHRISTOPHER MOMANY, CHAPLAIN ADRIAN COLLEGE, AND DR. ANDREW WINCKLES

As Free Methodists we rightfully focus on our own denominational history in this newsletter, but I would like to take us back to the 19th century and illustrate that the holiness movement was also alive in the Methodist Episcopal Church both before and after the Free Methodist Church formed. While free pews were one of several reasons the Free Methodists separated from the Methodists, another reason was the refusal of the Methodist Episcopal Church to denounce slavery. As a denomination Free Methodists did attempt to build a denomination that included African-Americans; yet, they had relatively little success. Why? We can speculate there were too few Free Methodists working in the south to successfully reach out to the black community in large numbers. Also, the rise of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was founded in 1816 and had grown by 1880 to 400,000 members, might have impacted where African-Americans chose to worship. A congregation with members who came from their own ethnic background and had similar cultural experiences is still appealing to everyone regardless of race. Whatever the reasons for lack of growth and integration of the African-American community in the late nineteenth century, the purpose of this article is to illustrate how intertwined the history of abolition is with the history of both of these denominations.

The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Anti-Slavery Movement

One of the most well-known early Methodist abolitionists was Asa Mahan, born in Vernon, NY in 1799. In 1831 Mahan was appointed to a church in Cincinnati, Ohio, and became a trustee at Lane Theological Seminary. In 1834 a group of theological students at Lane stood up against the seminary's policy of not admitting black students and their refusal to support immediate emancipation. When the seminary refused to change their policy (Mahan was the lone dissenter), a group of about 20 students left with Mahan for Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio, where Mahan became president. At the time of Mahan's arrival Oberlin was a small, struggling co-educational college. With Mahan as president and the influx of new students, Oberlin thrived and came to even greater notice under Mahan and his successor as president, the Rev. Charles Finney. One of those students to transfer from Lane to Oberlin with Mahan was David Stedman Ingraham. Ingraham graduated from Oberlin College and went to Jamaica as a missionary. Ingraham felt a call to help those who were now forging a new life post-slavery.

On Christmas Day 1839, Ingraham visited Port Royal, Jamaica, and saw the Ulysses, a slave ship the British government had impounded. His rare and detailed account provides agonizing detail about the slave trade and illustrates his passion to help those who emerged from it. Writing in his journal Ingraham worries about the church's apathy towards ending slavery while meditating on Psalm 13:

How Long, O Lord...O it seems as if the church were asleep, and Satan has the world following him. I took the size, slope and the measurement of the compartments where the slaves were confined and the following is (unreadable script) the number confined to each room. (see graph). These rooms are but 5 inches high. As I contemplate the awful suffering that these poor creatures must have endured during a passing of 50 days (the ship could hold approximately 556 slaves) from the coast of Africa. My soul is in distress and I feel to exclaim how long O Lord, how long shall these poor creatures be torn from their families and work to endure much for the desires of men?

Ingraham's passion is clear, but his life was unfortunately cut short at 29 by tuberculosis. However, during his life he was an avid abolitionist both on the mission field and in the United States, writing in his journal about visits to Quaker abolitionist Angelina Grimke and her abolitionist husband Theodore Weld and traveling to New York state to visit family (also ministers) who were abolitionists.

While not a Free Methodist, Ingraham was an early trailblazer in the anti-slavery movement. His mentor, Mahan went on to become president of Adrian College, which at the time was a Wesleyan Methodist institution.

Mahan himself was a major Methodist Holiness theologian and abolitionist who promoted the idea that, as he wrote in his journals, all humans have "intrinsic worth" and are valuable in the eyes of God. Based on this belief Mahan broke with most contemporary abolitionists (like William Lloyd Garrison) and argued that the Constitution of the United States was a fundamentally anti-slavery document because it affirmed this intrinsic worth based on natural law. While this opinion may seem strange to modern ears, it reflects Mahan's

deep-seated belief in the power of God to transform humankind—a belief that his pupil David Stedman Ingraham clearly shared and one that Free Methodist founder Benjamin Titus Roberts echoed.

Free Methodist Abolitionism

While many Free Methodists are aware of Roberts' strong views against slavery, they might not be aware that Roberts lived at the front line of the Underground Railroad while in Rochester and Genesee County New York. This area of the country (which Mahan also came from) was commonly known as the "burned over" district because of the numerous social reforms and religious movements that began in the Rochester area. Fredrick Douglas published his newspaper *The North Star* in Rochester and it was a regular route for runaway slaves to embark by boat over to Canada.

Like other abolitionists of the time, Roberts was extremely frustrated and angry about the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 which required residents in the free states to cooperate with slave catchers and owners seeking to retrieve their "property." Anyone who did not cooperate or aided a runaway was subject to six months in prison and a \$1,000 fine—an extremely steep penalty for the 1850s.

On the eve of the Civil War in 1861, Roberts wrote a scathing editorial in his publication *The Earnest Christian* regarding the sins of slavery and their effect on the nation:

We cannot help but feel bad over the commotions that are raging. Agitation renders putrid water sweet. Violent thunderstorms, even if they do some damage and frighten the timid, confer a great benefit, by drinking up the deadly miasmas and purifying the atmosphere. We believe in God. His hand is in the changes that are going on. He will bring good out of them. Perhaps, He takes this mode to effect the abolition of slavery... Grave and venerable bodies of professed ministers of the Lord Jesus, representing the popular Christianity of the age, have persisted in throwing the sanction of the Church around a system 'which,' says Dr. Adam Clarke, 'Among Christians, is an enormity and crime for which perdition has scarcely an adequate state of punishment.' The North will, we hope, cease

to be a hunting ground for chasing down our fellow men running for freedom, and Northern freemen no longer liable to be transformed into slave-catchers. The next fugitive slave law adopted should be taken from Deut. 13:15-16. 'Thou shalt not deliver his master the servant which is escaped from his master to thee: he shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose is one of thy gates where it liketh him best: thou shalt not oppress him.' Let Christian live near to God, and not be frightened into giving their sanction to any unholy compromises. (April 1861 p. 128 vol. II No.4; "The Dissolution of the Union")

After the Civil War, Free Methodists published accounts of African-American Free Methodists who experienced entire sanctification and had devoted their lives to ministry. Many of these accounts, such as Emma Ray's autobiography *Twice Sold, Twice Ransomed*, featured detailed accounts of the Civil War and the black experience immediately following emancipation. Other accounts such as Eliza Suggs *Shadows and Sunshine* discuss her father's experience post-emancipation and her parents' memories of slaves as part of her own personal narrative.

There is a long history within the Methodist tradition of supporting racial equality. It can be seen through early Methodist pioneers such as Ingraham and philosophers and leaders like Mahan and Roberts. Moving forward into the 21st century it is important as Free Methodists that we remember our deep commitment to racial equality and continue to see it as a foundational principle for our denomination. Though Ingraham died over 150 years ago, we too must echo his prayer, "How Long O Lord!" until the church awakens and addresses our original sin of racial injustice, inequality, and oppression?

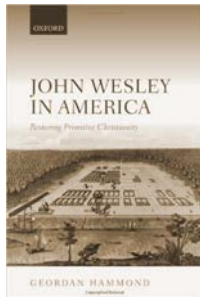
UNDERWRITE FREE METHODIST LEGACY THROUGH PLANNED GIVING

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.

Book Review

John Wesley in America: *Restoring Primitive Christianity*
By Dr. Geordan Hammond
Oxford University Press 2014
ISBN: 978-0198701606



In light of Geordan Hammond’s extensively researched and fully documented *John Wesley in America*, Wesley scholars will have to rethink their assessment of “the second rise of Methodism”—John Wesley’s nearly twenty-one months in Georgia, 1736–1737. Wesley went to America intent on “restoring the primitive church in a primitive environment” (154). This is Hammond’s core thesis, stated more fully at the outset, then elaborated

throughout the book.

The story is familiar; what is new is the way Hammond shows how consistently the quest for primitive Christianity was Wesley’s constant focus. Hammond elucidates Wesley’s Lutheran (not just Moravian) contacts on the *Simmonds* and in Georgia, something that has largely been overlooked. The various aspects of Wesley’s ministry in America are all clarified when seen through the lens of Wesley’s passion for primitive Christianity

as he then understood it. It was in the furnace of Georgia that Wesley began rethinking what “restoring the primitive church” actually meant. He pushed his highest of High Church ideals to the breaking point, then gradually reversed direction, moving toward a deeper, fuller, more transformative understanding and experience of true Christianity. By 1749 Wesley realized he had earlier pushed his “*High Church zeal*” to the point of violating Christian love (102).

At issue here: Is “primitive Christianity” the same as New Testament Christianity? Is third or fourth century Christianity still “primitive”? If normative early Christianity extends into the third or fourth centuries, then that determines issues of authority, structure, and liturgy in ways that are not the case if primitive Christianity refers to New Testament Christianity only.

Hammond concludes that Wesley “continued to believe that primitive Christianity provided a normative model to be restored. Wesley had no doubt that the doctrine, discipline, and practice of the primitive church was embodied by the Methodist movement. For Wesley, Methodism was the restoration of primitive Christianity. Though the people called Methodists were not without their faults, their basic pattern was that of the primitive church” (201–02). The brilliance of Wesley’s leadership was that he discerned how to do this at the level of foundational New Testament principles rather than trying to reinstitute “proper” liturgical practice that developed in subsequent centuries, and in typical both-and fashion, he did this within the framework of the Church of England, seeking both to renew Anglicanism and to preserve its richness.

– Dr. Howard A. Snyder

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