



HISTORIAN'S DIGEST

Volume XL Number 1

Spring 2000

PROMOTE HISTORY AND HERITAGE AWARENESS

IDEAS GLEANED FROM SECTION MEETING OF THE COMMISSIONS AND HISTORICAL SOCIETIES, JUNE 1999

In St. Paul, MN the Commissions and Historical Societies Section hosted a session concerned with the present and future of Annual Conference Commissions. After much discussion concerning the requirement that each Annual Conference consider the Commission as it restructures, the conversation shifted. Members from many conferences and historical societies began sharing ideas about how they maintain themselves as viable partners in the "collection and preservation of the historically significant records of the Annual Conference and its agencies."

Following is a list of ideas gleaned from the various attendees.

- ☞ Vary the meeting place for the regular society meeting. Explore different aspects of history at each meeting.
- ☞ Publish a magazine or newsletter of stories, including church anniversaries.
- ☞ Honor churches celebrating milestone anniversaries--100 years, 125, 150, etc.
- ☞ Honor deacons.
- ☞ Publish a newsletter with helps for the local historian.
- ☞ Honor someone as "Historian of the Year" on a local church level.
- ☞ Provide workshops on preservation, storage of materials, retention schedules, etc.
- ☞ Organize an all-day meeting with workshops, group meeting, banquet, etc.

- ☞ Celebrate Jubilee clergy on the Conference Floor or in some other manner.
- ☞ Find and maintain solid leadership within the organization.
- ☞ Contact new pastors each year to showcase the opportunities for service available in Archives & History.
- ☞ Provide a handbook to the District Superintendents. Include retention schedules, and procedures to follow when a church closes or two churches merge.
- ☞ Organize a one-day seminar to train the local church historian.

These are all good ideas. Many are easily done. What is your Commission or Historical Society doing?

What is your Commission Doing?

RENEWAL REMINDER

Please look at the address label on this newsletter. Above your name you will find the expiration date of your membership. If you see the date March 2000 or any earlier date, the time to renew your membership is now.

Our treasurer, would appreciate an early response. Send your checks to *Lyle Johnston, 512 S. 2nd Street, Williams, AZ 86046-2523.*

It is a great help when you renew on time. It saves time and money for volunteer officers.

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THAT REMINDS ME...

Robert Drew Simpson

WHY NOT TRY PEACE? THE STORY OF MARY & JOSEPH GOMER

United Methodists, who were formerly members of the United Brethren Church, will remember how deeply committed they were to their mission work in Sierra Leone. For the benefit of us all, however, I want to share an inspirational account of the first Afro-American missionaries sent to that country by the United Brethren Church. The story came to my attention through a manuscript written in 1968 by Charlotte Crisman.

The story begins with Joseph Gomer of Dayton, Ohio. He was born a free-black in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1834. Gomer could read and write. He understood a little arithmetic, but the rest of his education came from experience and a lively Christian faith. During the Civil War he was a cook in the Union Army. After the war on a steamer ship from New Orleans to Cincinnati he met Mary Green, a young widow. Before the trip was over they agreed to marry, and they were married in the United Brethren Church of Dayton in 1865. Joseph was 31 years old.

The United Brethren mission in Sierra Leone at that time was near failure. The problem centered on the Africans' mistrust of white American missionaries, white traders and government officials. The only hope was to send a well-trained Afro-American missionary to the field, but none existed. Mary and Joseph Gomer learning of the need volunteered. Although untrained as missionaries, they had the supreme qualification. They were committed Christians. Apparently circumstances were so bad the Mission Board reluctantly decided they had nothing to lose. On November 8, 1870 the Gomers were sent to Sierra Leone. Upon their arrival in Freetown on January 11, they immediately began persuading the people to join them in repairing the mission buildings. Working together with the native people they began encouraging them—a people who were especially warlike and distrustful even of one another—to live in peace. Constant warfare persisted. The two principal Chieftains of the Sherbro tribe

were cousins, George and Richard Caulker. They were, however, bitter enemies. Gomer, who with Mary, had earned the trust and respect of the people, brought the Chiefs together and convinced them that war only brought suffering and death to their tribes. His word to the Chiefs was, "Why not try peace?" The Chiefs agreed, and an amazing spirit of reconciliation spread rapidly. Relatives, who had been enemies for years, embraced and wept for joy. It was the beginning of vastly improved relations between the Africans and the missionaries. Why? Because two loving people by loving example elicited a sense of trust. Obviously Mary and Joseph were seen as ones who truly loved them.

For 22 years the Gomers served their sisters and brothers in Sierra Leone. These two Afro-Americans showed the people a more peaceful and productive life-style which aided in establishing a higher form of civil government. Joseph went to the common people in their rice

Continued on Page 6

Nov. 8,
1870, a
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HOW DO I JOIN?

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

Individual:	\$ 30 per year; \$ 55 for two years
Student:	\$ 20 per year
Family:	\$ 36 per year; \$ 67 for two years
Institution:	\$ 43 per year; \$ 80 for two years
Benefactor:	\$ 100 per year (\$70 gift credit for tax purposes)
Life:	\$ 500

*Outside U.S.A., add \$2 per year for postage. Some UM conference historical societies offer reduced joint memberships.

*Memberships are entered quarterly: January 1, April 1, June 1, or October 1 (allow 4 weeks for processing)

Make checks payable to the Historical Society and send to:

Lyle Johnston, Treasurer
512 So. 2nd St.
Williams, AZ 86046-2523

Consider a gift membership for a family member, friend, colleague, or local church library! Recipients will receive a special letter acknowledging the gift.

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OF THE UMC***

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

JOHN E. SIMS

With the coming of the new millennium, I have shifted my archives and history thinking from the concept of "searching" to the more active idea of "hunting". In a real sense, what we do in the Historical Society of the United Methodist Church is not just "search". We HUNT. You and I are in the business of actively pursuing fuller understanding of the past, preservation of material, and sharing of information to others in this day and age. Searching in an historical sense implies, to me, a more passive orientation toward that which has gone before. Hunting explains WHY we do what we do. Why we get ready, why we preserve the material and practice archival methods, why we show and share what we know and have with others.

Every one of us hopes someday to make that find: putting in the missing ancestral piece that completes our genealogy, discovering that unknown fact which makes sense out of a forebear's actions, and finding that lost-sought for volume that rounds out our collection. Such discovery is enhanced by a shift of thinking--from passive to active. Happy Hunting.

It is not
just a
Search,
We
Hunt!

REGRETS

It is with deep regret that we report the passing of John Boeder, the husband of Thelma Boeder. Thelma was the "local hostess" for the Annual Meeting last June on the campus of Hamline University. John passed away in late December. You can send cards and greeting to Thelma at 1124 Roselawn Avenue West, Roseville, MN 55113.

We send our deepest regards to Thelma and her family. They are in our prayers at this time and always.

2000 ANNUAL MEETING PLANNED

Central & Eastern Pennsylvania
Conference Commissions on Archives & History
and site representatives,
With
Baltimore-Washington Conference

will host

**The Historical Society of the United
Methodist Church Annual Meeting,**

September 24-26, 2000

at Wesley Memorial Church

on US 40 West near the Baltimore Beltway.

A tour will conclude a commemorative service at the Kemp House, founding place of the church of the United Brethren in Christ on September 24, 1800, on the actual anniversary date. Drama and notable speakers are also planned.

Hold these dates. Hotel rooms have been reserved. More information will be included in the April issue of HD.

For more information, contact **Ed Schell**, 2200 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21218 (410-566-3530 home or 410-889-4458 on M&F 10-4).

*Sept. 24-
26, 2000
Balti-
more,
MD*

SECTION NOTES

LOCAL HISTORY SECTION

BY ELDEN TRASTER

Does your local church prepare and maintain an annual historical accounting regarding its special events, celebrations, and property changes/improvements? Are the year's baptisms, marriages and deaths of members, by full name and date, not by number only, recorded in an annual survey?

I know I'll remember who our pastor was in 1989, but the reality is that eleven years later, I'm not sure. Mrs. Jones wants to write a church history, but she can't find the information. We'll just call the church office and have it researched. Who is there to do the research? The pastor is too busy. The secretary is new, and has no idea who the pastor was in 1989. Anyway, she belongs to another denomination, and she's not into the Methodist doings. She's learning, but it will take awhile.

What is the answer? If you are a local church historian, do write some notes about the events of the year: Who was the pastor? The Presidents of the UMW and UMM? What special projects did the church have? Was there an exceptional event/anniversary? Who was baptized? Who joined the church by transfer or profession of faith? Who got married and to whom? Who died?

If you are a district or conference historian, consider creating a form to sent to each church at the end of every year. This can guide historians, pastors and secretaries in recording the events of the year.

Across the years I have learned the importance, and great joy, of history. I have assisted with the historical updates from local churches in the Central Texas Conference for eighteen years. Over those years, an impressive accounting of each church's activities has been recorded.

Each of us has the privilege of recording the story. It is never too late to start!

GENEALOGY SECTION

BY HELEN LONG

The Genealogy Section will host a special session at the Annual Meeting of the Historical Society in Baltimore, next September.

Faith Richardson will present a talk of "*Two Great-Grandmothers Named Nancy: Widows of Methodist Clergy*". "It is my intention to present a unique story as well as to indicate various sources from which data was obtained," states Faith.

The meeting date will be **September 24-26, 2000 in Baltimore, Maryland**. At the business session, considerations will be given to: 1) Recommended changes to the Bylaws and 2) What resource tools this section can feasibly develop. Other suggestions are welcome. See you in Baltimore!

Section Officers:

C. Faith Richardson, President
Helen Long, Vice-president
Fern Christensen, Secretary
Mary Bakeman, Representative to the Board of Directors

MARCHING THROUGH IMMANUEL'S GROUND

Have you seen Marching Through Immanuel's Ground: the Evangelical Church on the Minnesota Prairie by Lorraine Esterly Pierce? Reading it is a treat.

Pierce bases her work on thorough research of published sources and interviews with present-day United Methodists in three areas of the state: Wells/Blue Earth; Pipestone/Luverne; and Madison/Bellingham.

Order copies of the book from the RLE Press, PO Box 732, East Lansing, MI 48826—\$19.95 plus \$3 shipping.

Copies of the book are also available for purchase **onsite** at the MN Conference Archives in St. Paul.

Two
Great-
Grand-
mothers,
Named
Nancy

HERITAGE SUNDAY

Sunday, April 23 has been designated Heritage Sunday [yes, they realize that is also Easter Sunday.] The theme is "*The World is Our Parish: The Americas*".

Each year, there is an article in *Interpreter* magazine introducing the theme. GCAH also publishes free (for a self-addressed stamped—for 2 oz.—envelope) resource information for the theme.

Let's help our people understand better our United Methodist heritage by celebrating Heritage Sunday!

By the way, a petition will appear before the General Conference which asks to move the date of Heritage Sunday. Currently it is celebrated the last Sunday in April. The petition asks to move it closest to the Aldersgate experience of John Wesley (May 24). The reason for the change is that sometimes Native American Awareness Sunday is also the last Sunday in April.

Continued from Page 2

fields and mud huts, showing them sympathy and compassion. Mary Green Gomer provided a home for missionaries and taught Bible and singing to the girls and boys in the villages. Their work helped establish the Sierra Leone mission for years to come.

During a furlough home in 1876 Joseph was finally and reluctantly ordained by the Miami Annual Conference. He died in 1892 in the mission field. Mary returned to the United States in 1894 and died just two years later in 1896.

As I write this story, it is an incredible coincidence that at the close of the 20th century, there is violence and political turmoil in Sierra Leone. The United Nations is at the task of trying to bring peace to this troubled place. Perhaps, the spirit of Mary and Joseph Gomer with their call for peace more than 100 years ago will prevail.



Let's
help
People
Under-
stand
Our
Heritage

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