

MARKETING MOUNTAIN MISSIONS: THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF RACE AND CLASS IN SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN METHODIST MISSIONS

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United Methodists and their predecessor denominations have been involved in mission activities in Appalachia since the beginnings of the Methodist movement in the United States. This paper focuses on the rise of the southern and central Appalachian mountain settlement schools and missions in the early 1900s–1930s. How did these organizations begin, and how were they sustained? How did the assumptions about race and class in Appalachia impact the mission interpretation of these settlement missions to the wider church and world? How did these missions “market” themselves to their respective churches and mission agencies and the women’s missionary societies? The paper will also look at the outside differences in interpretation and marketing between the church mission agencies and the women’s missionary societies. How did the church define who was “worthy” of mission support in Appalachia? How were (and are) Appalachian cultural stereotypes (both internally and externally) used to help raise support for the mountain missions and schools? How did the marketing of these missions change over the twentieth century? This paper will also show how these assumptions and stereotypes still impact how we address social issues in United Methodist mission in Appalachia.

The idea for this research came in part came about from some conversations I had in Kentucky. I served as the director of mission advancement at Henderson Settlement in Frakes, Kentucky from 2013–2018, and as part of my job had reason almost every week to interact with the nearly 2,500 volunteers and visitors who came to our corner of southeast Kentucky and

northern Tennessee each year. I was curious as to what had gotten them involved in coming down on a weeklong “mission trip” or longer volunteer time. I heard a lot of heartfelt stories and histories from different individuals—some had come for family reasons (their family was from that part of Appalachia and had moved north to Ohio, Indiana or Michigan in the one of the great Appalachian migrations in the 1930s or 1950s); or that they loved being able to come down and work on something positive as a church instead of “fighting like we always seem to be doing back home.”

But one man’s response caught my attention. He told me (back in summer, 2014) that he liked coming to a place “where the people were pure and not been corrupted by modern life.” That response puzzled me, and then I encountered other responses similar to that—making the point that Appalachia was a place where the purest of Americans still existed and that life was simple and undisturbed. It was in some ways a romantic idea of Appalachia as a place set apart, as a place where the past lays undisturbed, just waiting to be discovered.

Defining Appalachia

The first non-indigenous incursions into Southern Appalachia came in the 1750s with the arrival of Captain Thomas Walker, and later Daniel Boone and William Twitty in 1775. By the 1780s, there was a flood of settlers crossing the Cumberland Gap, moving on into Kentucky and the Midwest. The native Cherokee and other indigenous groups were soon displaced from the area, and by the early 1800s land grants and settlements were being established throughout southeast Kentucky. The new settlers were predominantly Scotch-Irish with a mix of nationalities and ethnicities also crossing the Gap.¹ Despite some of the narratives and histories, Southern Appalachia was always a diverse mix of peoples. By the 1830s, there were pockets of African Americans in southeast Kentucky, by the 1870s, increasing waves of immigrants from Italy and southern and eastern Europe, and most towns had Jewish communities, augmented by immigration in the 1890s and early 1900s from Russia and the Baltic areas. Despite a slow population loss over the past 50 years, southern Appalachia has continued to bring in immigrants.² Today southern Appalachia is even more diverse, with growing numbers of Spanish-speaking residents and diverse faith groups.³

But Appalachia has also played a unique role in American social and cul-

¹ By the early 1820s, it is estimated that several hundred thousand people travelled this historic route westward. Today, an estimated 47 million people in the United States are descendants of these early travelers. “Early American Frontier,” accessed December 3, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/cuga/learn/historyculture/early-american-frontier.htm>.

² Kelvin M. Pollard, “A ‘New Diversity’: Race and Diversity in the Appalachian Region,” Report from the Population Reference Bureau, Appalachian Regional Commission, (Washington, DC: Appalachian Regional Commission, September 2004), https://www.arc.gov/assets/research_reports/ANewDiversityRaceandEthnicityinAppalachia.pdf.

³ The largest city in southeast Kentucky, Middlesboro—adjacent to Harrogate, Tennessee, and Lincoln Memorial University—has a growing Latino population and a Bahai community.

tural history. The area began to be set apart and defined as “Appalachia” in the 1880s by magazine writers.⁴ Since that time, Appalachia has served as a mirror in which Americans and other outsiders could create stereotypes and make assumptions in both positive and negative ways. This certainly is not limited to Appalachia, but those assumptions have long impacted the way the area was seen by the “outside world” (such as an area of raw materials, a mission field, an area of poor native whites, an area of corrupt politics, etc.).⁵

The early settlements in Kentucky were soon followed by Methodist circuit riders, and by 1815 there were established Methodist circuits in southeast Kentucky (the Red Bird River Circuit) and Methodist meetings in the major towns such as Cumberland Ford (Pineville).⁶ After the Civil War, with the major development of coal mining in the area, Methodist churches (both northern and southern) were planted in major towns such as Middlesboro, Williamsburg and Harlan. There was also outreach from the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and African Methodist Episcopal, Zion (AMEZ) denominations toward African-Americans in the coal mining areas of southeast Kentucky. Other Methodist groups were nearby. There was a relatively strong Evangelical and United Brethren presence in neighboring east Tennessee that would have had some influence on that part of Kentucky.

Mission work in the southern United States in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War for the most part ignored the Appalachian areas. The focus (rightfully so) was on the urgent needs of the newly freed African Americans, especially their need for education and integration into society. The work of the American Missionary Association and that of major northern denominations was directed toward the establishment of mission schools and colleges.⁷

One institution that did significant work both before the Civil War and during Reconstruction was Berea College (and its Union Church), founded in 1855 by Rev. John Fee, a noted abolitionist. Berea had the stated purpose of educating both African Americans and whites together.⁸ Rev. Fee was persecuted for his beliefs and activities, but at the close of the war was able to

⁴ As early as March, 1873, *Lippincott's Magazine* published an article about Appalachia entitled “A Strange Land and a Peculiar People.” William Wallace Harney, “A Strange Land and a Peculiar People,” *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* 12.31 (October 1873): 429–437.

⁵ Rev. Jim Sessions, a former director of the Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA) often spoke of the history of southern Appalachia being determined by the raw materials there of water, timber, coal and rock.

⁶ Robert Sledge, *Five Dollars and Myself: The History of Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1845–1939* (New York: General Board of Global Ministries, 2005), 29.

⁷ One notable exception to this was the Holston Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, which operated primarily in the region of east Tennessee and southwest Virginia that had remained Unionist during the Civil War. Holston sought to reach out to primarily white residents with the construction of Grant University (a full college that included a theology school) with branches in Chattanooga (now the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga) and Athens (now Tennessee Wesleyan University). A non-denominational equivalent was Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tennessee (at the Cumberland Gap), which was constructed in the 1890s by General Otis Howard, in response to a promise made to President Lincoln, who wanted to build a school for the “loyal mountaineers.”

⁸ The motto of Berea College since its founding is from Acts 17:26: “God has made of one blood all peoples of the earth.”

restart the college and have integrated classes. The integrated classes came to an end in 1904, when the Kentucky legislature passed a law prohibiting educating blacks and whites.⁹ In an effort to continue educating African-American students, Berea's President Frost (under protest from many students and alumni) sought to address the issue by forming Lincoln Institute, a vocational and normal school, for the education of African-American students. What was happening at Berea began happening across the southern United States, as state legislatures in the wake of Reconstruction began to pass restrictive laws designed to enforce racial separation and eventually white supremacy in all parts of society. This was codified in the late 1890s as the "Jim Crow" laws took effect and de jure segregation became the norm across the South.¹⁰

Turn toward Appalachia

In 1899, the third president of Berea College, Dr. William Goodell Frost wrote an influential piece published in the *Atlantic Magazine*, "Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains." He called for a mission to the mountains, to educate the worthy mountaineer: "These eighteenth-century neighbors and fellow countrymen of ours are in need of a friendly interpreter; for modern life has little patience with those who are 'behind the times.'"¹¹ In 1893, President Frost had taken a long tour of seven southeastern Kentucky counties, and in the words of one historian, he

"discovered" a population in the eastern Kentucky mountains that preserved what he regarded as Early American handicrafts, music and other folkways . . . Just who were these Appalachian Americans? Frost emphasized that mountain people were real Americans because of their lineage from Revolutionary War-era pioneers and loyalty to the Union during the Civil War. Furthermore, in Frost's view, mountaineers had owned land, but had not owned slaves. Appalachian people were also worthy of interest and support, not only because of their patriotism, but because they were neither "foreigners, nor Catholics, nor aliens, nor infidels." Properly influenced and educated, Frost maintained that mountain people could make substantial contributions to the march of American progress.

Here, in "the mountainous backyards of nine states" was a region where pioneer people were living lives notable for quaintness rather than progress. Appalachian people, Frost noted, were "religious, truthful, hospitable, and much addicted to killing one another. They are leading a life of survivals, spinning cloth in a manner of centuries ago, and preserving many fine Shakespearean phrases and pronunciations; they may be called our contemporary ancestors!" For Frost, here was a population that could lead the way in uniting the country and demonstrate the practicality of

⁹ The Day Act, passed by the Kentucky legislature in 1904. The commonwealth of Kentucky had sought for many years to interrupt and stop the holding of interracial classes at Berea College.

¹⁰ The attitudes in the white South were never totally monolithic. There was scattered yet significant work and witness against Jim Crow both inside and outside the church. See Anthony Dunbar, *Against the Grain* (Charlottesville: U Virginia P, 1972), and the early work of the Highlander Center in Monteagle, Tennessee. There were pastors and professors who spoke up such as Dr. Alva Taylor of Vanderbilt University, in addition to significant, yet quiet, witness among some of the women's societies and their leadership.

¹¹ William Goodell Frost, "Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains," *Atlantic Magazine* (March 1899), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1899/03/our-contemporary-ancestors-southern-mountains/581332/>.

Berea's ideals.¹²

Dr. Frost's findings and remarks spurred others to rediscover Appalachia and to push for a mission in the mountains.¹³ Frost was criticized for shifting the focus from the original purpose of Berea toward focusing on the needs of "our mountain neighbors." His article was widely read, and soon the southern Appalachians were being rediscovered by most major denominations as a last frontier in the United States for mission. There was a racial component to this as well. The mountaineers were often described as being from "pure Anglo-Saxon stock" and "hardy Scotch-Irish ancestry."¹⁴ They emerged as a nearby mission field at the same time as the mission momentum for the African-American community was fading in the face of Jim Crow. Another social movement that was happening at this time was the creation of mission societies for women in several denominations (including the northern Methodists in 1869), and the growth of young women attending college and religious training schools in greater numbers toward the turn of the century. This new focus on mission outreach meant Appalachia was able to benefit from these converging trends.

One of the first mission projects in southern Appalachia was the establishment of mission and settlement schools. The first was Hindman School in Hindman (Knott County), Kentucky, established in 1902 by May Stone and Katherine Pettitt. Pettitt and Ethel DeLonge Zande also would go on to establish the Pine Mountain Settlement School (Harlan County) in 1913. The settlement schools were designed to not only be educational centers but also to teach culture, health and hygiene, and some vocational skills.¹⁵ These settlement schools were followed by many others throughout the southern

¹² Shannon Wilson, "William Goodell Frost: Race and Region at Berea College," https://libraryguides.berea.edu/ld.php?content_id=2237632.

¹³ The term "Appalachia" began to be used as a geographic identifier for the region in the 1880s.

¹⁴ Frost speaks of this more specifically in "Our Southern Ancestors":

The ancestry of the mountain folk is for the most part creditable. As has been indicated already it is almost wholly Revolutionary and British. In Kentucky a majority of the families may be traced back to rural England, both by distinct English traits and by the common English names like Chrisman, Baker, Allen, and Hazelwood. In other parts of the mountains the Scotch-Irish strain predominates, with corresponding names, including all the Macs But, whatever their origin, the "leading families" of the mountains are clearly sharers in the gracious influences which formed the English and Scottish people, and when a mountain lad registers by the name of Campbell or Harrison we have learned to expect that he will not prove unworthy of his clan.

¹⁵ The settlement house movement had originated in England in the 1840s with Toynbee House being one of the first. The movement spread to the United States in the 1880s, most notably with Jane Addam's Hull House in the 19th ward of Chicago, which worked with the newly arrived Italian and Polish immigrants in that area. Settlement houses had a variety of classes and services to help and educate persons in their communities. Jane Addams influenced many of the leaders of the Methodist women's mission societies. She knew Belle Bennett and Lucy Meyers Rider of the Chicago (deaconess) Training School, and spoke at several women's mission events on the subject of settlement houses. Karen Tice, "Settlement House Movement," and Philis Alvic, "Settlement, Mission and Sponsored Schools," in *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, eds., Jean Haskell and Rudy Abramson (Knoxville, U Tennessee P, 2006), 1550–1552.

Appalachians, and by World War II there were over 200 settlement schools scattered throughout the region.¹⁶ The settlement schools gave an opportunity for women to be in active ministry, and many had teachers who had come from women's colleges in the north and then deaconesses who came from deaconess training schools such as the Chicago Training School and later the Scarritt-Bennett Center.¹⁷

The settlement schools were part of the Appalachian mission focus, along with calls for ministers to come work in these "isolated areas."¹⁸ The same racial terminology was often used; "come work with these isolated Anglo-Saxon mountaineers," and a sense of solidarity in working with our benighted cousins in the mountains. There was a clear sense of being called to help these "poor unfortunates," and a sense that they were of a different class that needed help and education and cultural learning to be more "like us." This sense of the mountain whites being needy and objects of mission fit well within the corresponding cultural narrative of mountain whites being "hillbillies" and lacking in social skills and cultural mores.¹⁹ The Methodist

¹⁶ These included schools from almost every Protestant denomination, as well as Roman Catholic schools, and non-sectarian schools such as Hindman, Pine Mountain, and the John B. Campbell folk school in western North Carolina. There were also mission schools segregated for specific ethnicities, such as the Vardy school in Hancock County, Tennessee, that was for the local Melungeon population. Many of the schools closed or changed after World War II, and evolved into colleges (Lees-McRae, Warren Wilson, University of North Carolina-Asheville) or were merged into local county school systems (for example, Archer School and Kingdom Come Settlement). From my count there are about 24 settlement schools still in existence (including the original ones at Hindman and Pine Mountain); six of them are still supported by the Daughters of the American Revolution. Karen W. Tice, "Settlement House Movement," and Philis Alvic, "Settlement, Mission and Sponsored Schools," in *The Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, eds. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell (Knoxville: U Tennessee P, 2006), 1550–1552.

¹⁷ The original women who came to Hindman and Pine Mountain were graduates from Vassar, Mt. Holyoke and other women's schools in the northeast. See Nancy K. Forderhase, "Eve Returns to the Garden: Women Reformers in Appalachian Kentucky in the Early Twentieth Century," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 85.3 (Summer 1987), 237–261. These women were part of a new generation of women who were exploring new ways of being in service and mission. Some of these women had connections to other parts of Kentucky (the Breckenridges were from Louisville, and Belle and Sue Bennett were from London), but the majority were from the northeast and Midwest. The young female teachers at Hindman and Pine Mountain were called sometimes called "fetched-over women" by the locals, as they had been brought down (fetched down) to teach. This parallels the rise of the deaconess movement a few years later where young women would find a more formal way to serve in mission within the church structure.

¹⁸ In one of the mission reports of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1923 there is the call to outreach to the "scores of counties in the south central states (of Appalachia) where the highlanders dwell in poverty and woeful ignorance and superstition, so familiar in song and story." Ralph Diffendorfer, editor, *The World Service of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Chicago: Methodist Episcopal Church, Council of Boards of Benevolence, Committee on Conservation and Advance, 1923), 345–346.

¹⁹ Secular groups shared many of those initial assumptions. The women's group Pi Beta Phi, which in 1912 founded the crafts school in Gatlinburg, Tennessee (now called Arrowmont), had a song describing their mountain work with the lines "We Pi Phi sisters here, they hillfolk sisters there, we in the midst of all things lovely and true, they for whom the whole world seems askew." Shirley Robinson, "Pi Beta Phi's Healthcare Mission: Forging Bonds between Gatlinburg, Tennessee and the Nation's Dominant Culture, 1912 to 1965" (paper presented at Society of Appalachian Historians Conference, Jonesborough, Tennessee, May, 2011), 2.

women's home mission groups became very involved in the mission to the mountains, but continued to concentrate on missions involving African Americans as well as city missions.²⁰

Henderson Settlement and Red Bird Mission

The two faith-based settlement schools and missions in far southeast Kentucky, Henderson Settlement and Red Bird Mission, were founded four years apart by different predecessor bodies of the United Methodist Church. Red Bird Mission was founded as a clinic in 1921 by members of the Evangelical Church. Though relatively small by comparison to other Methodist bodies in Appalachia both the Evangelical Church and the United Brethren had a presence in east Tennessee. The mission board of the Evangelical Church had looked at other sites in southern Appalachia to work in the mountains. The decision was made to go to southeast Kentucky, and soon Dr. John DeWall and his family traveled to Beverly, Kentucky. Red Bird Mission's work grew to include a second campus six miles away at Queendale, and today Red Bird Mission and Christian School serves three counties (Bell, Clay, and Jackson) in Kentucky.

Henderson Settlement was founded in 1925 by a Methodist Episcopal pastor from Indiana named Rev. Hiram Frakes. Frakes had originally come to southeast Kentucky in response to a general plea from Bishop Henderson for pastors to come and help with the work in Appalachia.²¹ Frakes first served two smaller churches in Harlan County, and then served as pastor of the county seat Methodist church at Pineville (Bell County), some 18 miles away from the western edge of the county, where Henderson Settlement would eventually be located. In 1925, Frakes founded a small school for the community, which would operate until the 1970s. Henderson Settlement at various times has had branches in Harlan County (Kingdom Come Settlement School) and Claiborne County, Tennessee (Archer School). Today Henderson Settlement's service area encompasses parts of three counties in Kentucky (Bell, Whitley, and Knox) and two in Tennessee (Campbell and Claiborne), with a small satellite campus in White Oak, Tennessee.

From their founding, both Red Bird Mission and Henderson Settlement relied on donations from outside the area, and still do today. A prime source for sharing the needs and asking for donations was (and remains) the Henderson Settlement newsletter. At its inception in 1925, it was called *Kentucky Mountain Missions*—and later, the *Henderson Holler*—and was mostly published on a monthly basis. The newsletters from 1925 through the 1940s were primarily edited by Hiram Frakes and were full of details of

²⁰ In an interesting paragraph in the 1939 Holston (MECS) *Annual Conference Journal*, Mrs. J. E. Wolfe reports that the Holston Conference Missionary Society's history, focusing upon the "intelligent and zealous labors for the evangelization of the colored race" and concern for the women in the "dells and caves of the mountains as well as the towns and cities."

²¹ There are two Hendersons after whom the Settlement is named, Methodist Bishop Henderson and Bill Henderson, the latter a noted "king of the moonshiners," who donated sixty acres for the school in 1925.

activities at the Settlement, news about the school, and all sorts of fundraising ideas and plans (new businesses, cooperative efforts, and craft and thrift store news). Donations of both funds and items were mentioned in every issue, and from almost the first issue there were articles about estate gifts and leaving Henderson Settlement in one's will. A constant refrain in almost every issue were positive stories about how the Settlement was making a difference in the lives of the surrounding mountain families. But another refrain both in the early newsletters and in "on the road" presentations and mission talks was the frequent mention of the people of "South America" as "pure native Anglo-Saxon stock."²² Another theme was the isolation and poverty of the people in the area. One example from the *Kentucky Mountain Missions* reads:

The school is located in one of the most isolated and inaccessible portions of the whole state. Prior to the founding of the school the people were the most ignorant and illiterate of our citizenship . . . (Hiram Frakes) has taken the light of civilization and Christianity into a most benighted country and the people in that section have responded in a way that is most gratifying and yet pathetic.²³

These sentiments were echoed by church officials, bishops, and mission officials in the larger church.²⁴ E. D. Kohlstedt of the Methodist Board of Home Missions wrote, "(These) mountain mission ministries (have aided) the children of these worthy people who, despite their isolation and consequent limitations, are descendants from America's purest original stock."²⁵ The same mission official a few months quoted President Frost of Berea about the lineage of these mountaineers: "Direct descendents from colonials of British, Dutch and German extraction, faithful to the primitive customs and social ideals of their forefathers, these mountain men are the lineal offspring from American pioneer settlers."²⁶ In the July 15, 1934, issue of *Kentucky Mountain Missions*, the President of nearby Lincoln Memorial University wrote:

Clinging to the mountain sides and nestling in the hollows one finds some four million Americans—descendants of the finest stock to settle this country. Here you find the new generations of Scotch-Irish, English, Germans and French Huguenots . . . They could not be fettered nor held down by civilization. They wanted action; they

²² Hiram Frakes was on the road at least six months a year traveling to churches and conferences across the United States (but especially in the Midwest), speaking and preaching to fundraise for the work of Henderson Settlement. He often took with him a choir composed of students from Henderson Settlement. One of the most popular groups was a quartet called "The Sunbonnet Girls," who dressed up in "Appalachian style" and wore bonnets. South America was the name often used for the area in which Henderson Settlement was located, the name referring to the isolation of the area. Other place names were Lambden, Pearl and Linda, and the post office name was changed to Frakes in 1936 in honor of Hiram Frakes.

²³ "They Must Not Be Disappointed," *Kentucky Mountain Missions* 2.6 (August 1931).

²⁴ Bishop Henderson and Bishop Smith of the Methodist Episcopal Church were frequent contributors to the *Kentucky Mountain Missions*.

²⁵ E. D. Kohlstedt, "A Worth While Task," *Kentucky Mountain Missions* 4.2 (April 15, 1933).

²⁶ E. D. Kohlstedt, "Pocketed Among Southern Highlands" *Kentucky Mountain Missions* 4.3 (June 15, 1933).

wanted experience; they wanted the very thing that you and I want today.²⁷

In the March 15, 1935, issue of *Kentucky Mountain Missions*, Miss Ethyl M. Wood described in even greater detail her opinion of the racial makeup of the area around Henderson Settlement, “The people living in this section known as ‘South America’ are of the purest American stock; that is, are descendants of the earliest settlers of English, Scotch and Irish blood. There is not a foreigner among them, and a negro is almost never seen anywhere in the mountains. The children, so many of them tow-headed, or golden-haired blondes, come to school over hill-or-mountain paths and roads, some of them for a number of miles.”²⁸

These themes were also lifted up by writers outside the Methodist church. Larry Vaughn, Manager of the Middlesboro Chamber of Commerce wrote in a 1926 article for the paper titled, “Peaceful Industrial People of ‘South America’ Eager to Learn: Trip Reveals Need for Help,”

How just a little taste of education has done a heap to overcome an appetite for liquor several generations old and at the same time awoken a citizenship to a new purpose, is outstandingly seen in the influence already gained in the so-called South America district by the Henderson Settlement School. The love for moon shine dwindles and flickers while an eager people grasp for their first opportunity to find new satisfactions in something better . . . Clean Anglo-Saxon type are they—a people allowed to build for themselves a loose code of living without respect for law other than that which they have made themselves. One child coming into school said, “I don’t know that it was not nice for girls to chew tobacco until you Henderson School people came.”²⁹

In the late 1940s, after the end of the Second World War, and with the retirement of Rev. Frakes and the coming of the new director, Rev. Glenn “Tex” Evans, the newsletter and other promotional literature for Henderson Settlement changed both in format and in tone.³⁰ But some of those early themes still resonate.

Marketing Mountain Missions Today

When volunteers and work teams now come to Henderson Settlement or Red Bird Mission for a week, there is an emphasis on learning about Appalachia. There is an Appalachian music night (at Henderson there is a great local bluegrass band; at Red Bird Mission there is an accomplished dulcimer player and other musicians). Both have craft stores with works of local artisans. And at Henderson Settlement there is a Monday night program that explains our work in Appalachia, along with some of the histo-

²⁷ Stewart McClelland, “Lost America,” *Kentucky Mountain Missions* 5.2 (July 15, 1934).

²⁸ “Our Mountain Children,” *Kentucky Mountain Missions* 6.2 (March 15, 1935).

²⁹ *Middlesboro (KY) Daily News*, October 2, 1926. Another writer (J.A. Stuckey in Lexington, KY) sent a personal letter to Rev. Frakes on April 24, 1925, hoping that he would build this school and “salvage the one hundred percent Americans who are mountain locked, without roads, schools or churches in the Appalachian Mountains.”

³⁰ Following his service as executive director of Henderson Settlement, Tex Evans founded the Appalachian Service Project in 1969.

ry of the region. One thing that is stressed much more is the diversity in Appalachia, and how southern Appalachia is a diverse and complex area. Red Bird Mission has brought diversity even closer to home by opening up their school to international students in 2013. There are now students from many different countries, with a variety of languages. In that area of Bell County, Appalachia suddenly looks much more diverse. The international students have had a real impact not only in the school but out in the local communities and helped to change some local perceptions about who might be “an Appalachian.”³¹

Henderson Settlement, Red Bird Mission and the other remaining Appalachian Settlement schools and missions are in a period of reflection as to who we are called to be in this time in Appalachia. We still need to raise money, but our traditional donor base is transitioning, and Appalachia (as it always has) is changing. Like other churches, The United Methodist Church is changing as well; there is a decrease in funds from some of the traditional, faith-based funding sources. And there is much more of an emphasis on local sustainability and on making sure that—to paraphrase a famous recent book—we are “Helping, not Hurting.”

Perhaps the most important change in Appalachia is the increased access to the internet and to social media. We now see the world and unfolding events and news in real time, instead of weeks or months later. The negative side of this is that our stereotypes and assumptions (and biases and other “isms”) can be viewed in Appalachia in real time. For Henderson Settlement, there is an awareness that we have to pay attention to how we present and distinguish ourselves in electronic media and in how we craft our message, especially in a world where almost every non-profit and church is competing for much of the “mission audience.”³² Increasingly social media (both for timeliness and cost efficiency) is a major way of telling the Henderson Settlement story and news, both outside the mountains and inside our hills and hollers. In the past five years we have become much more intentional in what we are saying and how we view ourselves, our neighbors, and our donors and volunteers. And that’s a good thing. Hopefully we will learn to see ourselves in some new and more realistic ways, within and beyond southern Appalachia.

³¹ Berea College and the Loyal Jones Appalachian Center have been instrumental in helping to share and promote the diversity of Appalachia. Berea has also recovered its own historic roots, and over 30% of its students are African American from both Appalachia and elsewhere.

³² Henderson Settlement keeps an almost daily presence on Facebook, and since 2017 has a weekly Facebook live stream called “The Big Show.” The show has won awards the last two years from the United Methodist Association of Communicators and has a strong following in viewership across the country.