

HISTORIAN'S DIGEST



Volume 51, Number 4

Fall, 2011

GCAH GENERAL SECRETARY, ROBERT WILLIAMS, REFLECTS ON UPCOMING LEGISLATION AT THE 2012 GENERAL CONFERENCE

Now that the fall has arrived, attention turns to speculating what the next General Conference will do. Some of the most radical legislation is arising out of the work of the Interim Operations Team. This is a group of 7 persons which was formed after the recommendations were received from another group that was known as "Call to Action." The Connectional Table has prepared legislation for General Conference replacing the directors of 10 of the general agencies, including the General Commission on Archives and History with a single governing board of 15 persons to oversee all the work of the general church called the Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry. There would also be a larger body called the General Council for Strategy and Oversight. The staff of GCAH would certainly prefer to be accountable to a commission made up of persons who understand and appreciate this work. The General Secretary will advocate for the continuation of the General Commission as a free standing agency of the church. The other important recommendation coming from the Connectional Table is the following revision to par. 641 (amendments are indicated by strikethrough and new language is underlined):

¶ 641. 1. In each annual conference there ~~shall~~ may be a conference commission on archives and history. The number of members of the commission and their terms of office ~~shall~~ may be as the conference may determine and may include an ex officio representative of each United Methodist heritage landmark in its bounds. It ~~shall~~ may be the duty of the commission to collect, preserve, and make accessible the historically significant records of the annual conference and its agencies, including data relating to the origin and history of the conference and its antecedents...to provide for the ownership of real property and to receive gifts and bequests; to nominate to the ~~General Commission on Archives and History~~ Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry buildings, locations, or structures within the annual conference for designation as historic sites or heritage landmarks...to establish retention and disposition schedules for annual conference and local church records under standards or guidelines developed by the ~~General~~

~~Commission on Archives and History~~ Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry; to cooperate with and report, when requested, to the general and jurisdictional commissions on archives and history; and to engage with other Wesleyan, Methodist, or Evangelical United Brethren-related denominations in lifting up our joint heritage.

The legislation from the Connectional Table also notes to "delete all references to the General Commission on Archives and History and replace with the Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry except when referring to its role or position in historical record or otherwise specified. See paragraphs 264, 641, 702, 703, 705, 906, and 1701-1712."

At the General Conference of 2008, I was able to prevent the Conference Commission from becoming optional. As you see, this is being proposed again. The "ministry of memory" in the conferences will be impaired if such a petition is adopted.

It is hard to answer the question about how all of this will work. It has been hinted that there would need to be a transition period of 2-4 years. I think the day-to-day working of the staff would stay the same, especially the archive staff, but the role of the General Secretary could be very different. Our functions would be maintained but governance issues would shift to the 15 person board. I would personally regret not having contact with the committed folks who have constituted the voting members of the commission from its founding in 1968.

In other business relating to the General Conference, GCAH is recommending the naming of five new Heritage Landmarks: College of West Africa in Liberia; Old Muture Site in Zimbabwe; Mary Johnston Hospital in Manila; Newtown Indian Church in Oklahoma; and Simpson House (first senior care facility in the MEC) in Philadelphia.

The budget being recommended to the General Conference will cut funds to GCAH by just over 4%. No matter what is ahead we will continue to network with persons across the connection, service all units of our denomination, collect, preserve and share the record of faithful discipleship, and remind all of who we are for the shaping of a vision for the future.

Historical Society of the UMC

Dan Swinson, President
223 North Emerson Street
Mt. Prospect, IL 60056-2509
djswinson@wowway.com

Jim Morris, Vice President
1103 Joshua Avenue
Creston IA 50801
641-782-2715
mjmorris_jm@hotmail.com

Barbara Essen, Secretary
P.O. Box 655
Pomeroy, WA 99347
509-843-1212 (h)
bessen@peoplepc.com

Charles Yrigoyen, Treasurer
950 Willow Valley Lakes Dr.,
#1-106
Willow Street PA 17584-9663
717-464-3276
jyrigoyen@cs.com

Patricia J. Thompson, Editor
P. O. Box 538
Morrisville VT 05661
802-888-2185
pajt8817@aol.com

Philip Lawton, Membership
Secretary
P. O. Box 247
Felton DE 19943
philip.lawton@verizon.net

Program Committee:
Carol Roszell
crozell@txwes.edu

Linda Schramm
lars@greatlakes.net

Rob Sledge
rsledge@mcm.edu

Chris Shoemaker
brothershoe@zebra.net

Please send address changes to Phil Lawton. Editorial correspondence should be directed to Pat Thompson. The deadline for submissions for the next issue is January 1, 2012.

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NEJCAH to Host the 2012 HSUMC Annual Meeting

The Northeastern Jurisdiction Commission on Archives and History will host the 2012 HSUMC Annual meeting in Gettysburg, PA, on May 14, 15, 16, and 17. The theme of the meeting will be "Methodism's Civil Wars." There will be presentations on the national splits in the Methodist Episcopal, United Brethren and Evangelical denominations – all of which significantly affected area United Methodism.

There will also be presentations by regional scholars/authorities on "The spirituality of Abraham Lincoln" (including his ties with Methodism) and "The Gathering Storm" (the events and dynamics that led to the Civil War as well as to the MEC/MES split) and "The Retreat From Gettysburg" (the little known "rest of the story" of what followed the battle). Also featured in the meetings will be the remarkable stories of some United Methodists (laity and clergy, prominent and ordinary) whose lives and ministries were directly affected by the Battle of Gettysburg.

A more detailed schedule and registration materials will appear in the Winter issue of *Historian's Digest*. The following is a condensed version of the schedule:

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|-------------------|--|
| Monday, May 14: | optional afternoon tour of the Gettysburg Battlefield |
| Tuesday, May 15 | opening with worship at 9am programs, reports, business meetings and awards (HSUMC Saddlebag Selection and Ministry of Memory Award) |
| Wednesday, May 16 | Tour Day |
| Thursday, May 17 | programs, reports, business meetings, closing worship with lunch served at 12 noon optional afternoon tour of the Gettysburg Battlefield |

The cost for the event will be \$100 registration per person (for meals, presentations, admissions, and the tour) and \$66.50 per room per night (for 1-4 occupants, including all taxes, and payable directly to the motel). The optional battlefield tour is \$15. Look for registration forms and a detailed program in the Winter issue of *Historian's Digest*.

New Book on Women's History Due to be Published



Ellen Blue, Ph.D.

St. Mark's and the Social Gospel: Methodist Women and Civil Rights in New Orleans 1895-1965 written by Dr. Ellen Blue, Mouzon Biggs, Jr. Associate Professor of the History of Christianity & United Methodist Studies at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, OK, is due to be published before the end of the year. This book concentrates on the women reformers (especially deaconesses) at St. Mark's Community Center and nearby St. Mark's Methodist Church in the city of New Orleans, shedding new light on the role of women in the social gospel era which has been previously defined primarily by the men and the theology and institutions which they created.

To pre-order from the University of Tennessee Press, go to www.utpress.org/stmarks and use code UTPSTM (until November 30) for a 30% discount. For further information, contact Ellen Blue at 918-270-6443 or ellen.blue@ptstulsa.edu.

Editor's Note: The following article was submitted by Judi Fergus, Director, Arthur Moore Methodist Museum, Library and Archives, Epworth by the Sea, and was written by Sue Bailes, one the volunteers at the Museum. Sue is from Americus, GA, has a Ph.D. from Edinburgh University, and is currently retired. Though we may all know a great deal about circuit riders, in her article focusing on circuit riders from Georgia, she reminds us, once again, about the strenuous, yet faithful, lives which they lived.

The Circuit Rider

By Sue Bailes

The term “circuit rider” is not often heard in modern Methodism. Yet, it refers to a person so significant in early American Methodism that one wonders what would be the state of today’s church if the circuit riding preachers had not laid the groundwork for the church in generations to come. Who, then, were these preachers? What is the circuit rider’s story?

A circuit rider was an ordained Methodist preacher who traveled, most often on horseback, with his Bible and precious few belongings into the remoteness where residents of this fledgling country found themselves. Well into the nineteenth century, ninety percent of Americans lived in settlements having fewer than 2500 people.¹ All too often, these early Americans were on isolated farms without a neighbor close by.

Into this rough and rugged country, Bishop Francis Asbury sent preachers to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. The exact date of the first circuit rider and who he was is not recorded in the earliest records of American Methodism. However, in the second precursor of what came to be known as “Annual Conference,” Methodist preachers meeting in Philadelphia on May 25, 1774, determined that, “Every preacher who is received into the full connexion (sic), is to have the use and property of his horse which any of circuits may furnish him with.”²

Additionally there was to be a collection taken at Easter “in the circuits where they labour (sic), to be applied to the sinking of the debts on the houses, and relieving the preachers in want.”³ The meeting minutes seem to infer that Thomas Rankin, “Assistant,” was one of the first preachers to be identified as a circuit rider: “Wherever Thomas Rankin spends his time, he is to be assisted by those circuits.”⁴ There were seventeen preachers and 2,073 Methodists in the new America.⁵ Brother Rankin’s circumstances in the next annual meeting, also in Philadelphia, were such that it was decreed “Thomas Rankin’s deficiencies be paid out of the yearly collections.”⁶ There were now nineteen preachers and 3,148 Methodists in America.⁷

Methodism in the New World grew steadily; each year sending clergy into new territory. In 1785, that new territory was the entire state of Georgia and the first circuit rider to come was Beverly Allen who had been made an Elder at the Christmas Conference of 1784.⁸ He would serve two years before becoming a presiding elder in South Carolina.⁹ At the end of his year, there were 78 Methodists in Georgia.¹⁰ He was replaced by John Major and Thomas Humphries; and in the annual report of 1787, the Methodists in Georgia were now numbered at 450.¹¹

What might these men of God expect as they rode searching for places to preach the word of God to anybody they had the good fortune to find? They and every other circuit rider had extraordinarily difficult tasks. Equipped with sturdy leather saddlebags such as the one on display at the Moore Methodist Museum at Epworth by the Sea, St Simons Island, GA, the preacher loaded his few books, maybe some paper, what small wardrobe he had and set off on his horse. Doubtless, he had some bread and found water along the way. As he encountered people, there is little doubt that this dedicated man of God inquired about the state of the stranger’s soul and possibly gave an exhortation. As the day’s end drew near, he looked for a cabin and anticipated food and lodging for both himself and his horse. For these were good country folk and there would be food and a place for both. The residents were generally glad to see the circuit rider for he brought news of the area and beyond. These people shared what they had; it was quite often very Spartan—wild game, including bear, that the men folk had killed; perhaps, some cornbread made from the farmer’s own corn, possibly some buttermilk, maybe some sorghum and the same menu for breakfast.¹² He might have

to sleep on the cabin's dirt floor with his own coat for covering. Add to all of that fleas and filth—dirty people, dirty house—dirt!¹³ But he was a Methodist preacher and he had a sermon and prayers with the family before they all retired in the one-room cabin.¹⁴

The preacher might stay the second night or longer, and neighbors would come in to hear both news and his message. Often times, he would return time and again to preach in the same cabin or that of a neighbor. More than a few souls were brought to the Lord in these primitive circumstances. The circumstances, however, were not always so primitive. One imagines that the home of General Dill where Elder Samuel Johnson held meetings was probably quite comfortable in its time. These meetings led to the organization of the Methodist Church in Fort Gaines, Ga. in 1822.¹⁵

For riding horseback for hundreds of miles, encountering wild beasts, Indians and, sometimes rogues, through all manner of inclement weather—snow, rain, intense heat—most primitive accommodations and sometimes sleeping on the ground when there was no cabin at hand, the circuit rider was paid some \$80 a year, and he did not always get paid.¹⁶ Their lifespan was shortened by the difficulty of their lives. Records show that of the 700-plus Methodist pastors who died before the middle of the nineteenth century, more than twenty percent were under the age of 35.¹⁷ This very difficult life was not suitable for a married man and, indeed, there were few husbands in this ministry until later on when the circuits were shortened and the preacher served several specific churches. A fictionalized account of the life of a Georgia circuit rider in the early 20th Century is Corra Harris' *A Circuit Rider's Wife*, which has been republished and printed. These men—these circuit riders—were men of great faith, fortitude and forbearance. Today's Methodists should remember them with gratitude.

1. Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism*, (Editions du Signe, Strausbourg, France: 1999), 52. Hereafter cited as Kinghorn.
2. "Minutes of the Methodist Conference annually held in America; From 1773 to 1813", Vol. 1 (Daniel Hit and Thomas Ware, For the Methodist Connexion of the United States, 1813), 8. Hereafter cited as Conference Minutes.
3. Conference Minutes, 8.
4. Conference Minutes, 8.
5. Conference Minutes, 10.
6. Conference Minutes, 10.
7. Conference Minutes, 10.
8. Harold Lawrence, *Methodist Preachers in Georgia 1783-1790* (Boyd Publishing Co., Ltd: Tignall, GA, 1984), 6.
9. Conference Minutes, 61.
10. Conference Minutes, 61.
11. Conference Minutes, 58 and 66.
12. Corra Harris, *A Circuit Rider's Wife* (Henry Altemus Company: Philadelphia, 1910), 87.
13. Kinghorn, 57.
14. Conference Minutes, 25.
15. Marynell S. Waite, *History of the South Georgia Conference, The United Methodist Church 1866-1984* (Taylor Publishing Company: Dallas, Texas), 354.
16. Kinghorn, 53.
17. Kinghorn., 56.



ALABAMA-WEST FLORIDA CONFERENCE HONORS THE HISTORY AND FOUNDERS OF BLUE LAKE CAMP

Emphasis during the annual meeting of the Historical Society for October, 2011, will be on the history of Blue Lake Camp, from its beginnings to current day. This has required much research including contacting church members and retired ministers, and consulting both Conference Journals and a book written by the first Director before his death. This has been a great time to so remember the people involved as many are no longer with us - but what a legacy they have left for the children, youth, ministers and church members, including adults. Some of the letters solicited gave first hand experiences - some before ground was even broken. While undertaking work projects to clear the land, they lived in tents. Food was cooked over an open fire by a minister's wife. From this humble beginning this church camp has grown into three separate camps - Pinewood, Dogwood, and Oakwood Lodge. While exploring the sources of funds for the buildings, it was amazing to discover how low the cost had been versus the value of the land and buildings today. There is no comparison.

Dr. Melvin Baker was the senior minister at Andalusia First Methodist in 1948 and he was an avid fisherman, along with church member, E. E. Anthony, Sr. Mr. Anthony invited him to fish with him at Blue Lake and the idea of a church camp there was born. It was not easy to obtain the land from the Forestry Department nor was it easy to get the Annual Conference to agree to support the effort, but Dr. Baker was not a man who would let a dream go. He stayed with it, and now we have a legacy that has had a lasting influence on the future of the United Methodist Church in this Conference. The churches surrounding the area joined in support of having a camp, then the children, youth and adults in each and every church contributed in large and small ways to building and maintaining the church camp at Blue Lake. Today, it operates year round and reaches out beyond the Conference to provide a place to assist the visually handicapped to enjoy camping. Mentally challenged youth and adults enjoy the camping experience there, as well. Some non-profit groups find it an ideal place to hold annual meetings. It also serves as a safe place during storms on the Gulf Coast and housed many refugees from Katrina and other such storms.

The current director, Phyllis Murray, and her staff have joined with the Historical Society to explore and record this unusual history during the 60th year of its existence, celebrating the birth as well as the history.



Cross at Blue Lake Camp

The meeting will be a two day affair with tours of the camp sites, vespers, panel discussions, dramatic presentations, singing of hymns and camp songs, a birthday cake, and a bonfire with s'mores. Blue Lake is located within the Concecuh National Forest on land once belonging to the government. It is a natural lake with an underground water source that remains full year round, south of Andalusia, Alabama, and near the center of the conference, including the southern end of the state and the panhandle of Florida. The lake is perfect for swimming and canoeing with each camp site sporting its own swimming area. Yet, a good church member also donated a swimming pool to add to the tennis courts next to the gymnasium. Hiking is another activity for campers to experience. Each camp site has its own kitchen and dining facility and two camps have small cabins for campers to sleep and bathe. Everything is indoors at the Lodge built for adult campers.

It is hoped that a very special book will be written and published out of the research done by the Historical Society as boxes of pictures have been located showing the beginnings and progression of the building of the camp sites. Unfortunately, names were not given, but some past leaders can be recognized. We plan to have a competition during the Annual Meeting to see who can identify the most campers from those pictures.

By Myrtice Carr, Vice President
Alabama-Florida Historical Society

As noted in the Summer 2011 *Historian's Digest*, below you will find the Treasurer's Report for the year 2010/2011 submitted by Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. and the Approved Budget for 2011/2012:

HSUMC TREASURER'S REPORT/JUNE 30, 2011

HSUMC Approved Budget for 2011-2012

Balance – June 30, 2010		\$17,422.12
	Budget	Actual
Income:		
Dues	\$ 7,000.00	\$ 5,902.20*
Reserves	<u>6,500.00</u>	<u>3,839.56</u>
Total Income	\$12,100.00	\$ 9,741.76
Expenses:		
<i>Methodist History</i> (Quarterly)	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 4,550.87
<i>Historian's Digest</i> (Quarterly)	1,300.00	1,413.81
Awards	1,500.00	1,188.90
Travel (Board Of Directors)	4,000.00	2,075.00
Insurance	225.00	415.21
Postage And Miscellaneous	<u>75.00</u>	<u>97.97</u>
Total Expenses	\$12,100.00	\$ 9,741.76
Balance – June 30, 2011		\$13,582.56

Income:	
Dues	\$5,700.00
From Reserves	<u>6,800.00</u>
Total Income	\$12,500.00
Expenses:	
<i>Methodist History</i>	\$ 5,000.00
<i>Historian's Digest</i>	1,400.00
Travel (Board of Directors)	4,000.00
Awards	1,500.00
Insurance	500.00
Postage and Miscellaneous	<u>100.00</u>
Total Expenses	\$12,500.00

Just a reminder: At the 2011 Annual Meeting the Historical Society established the Albea Godbold Development Fund, named for the predecessor of the General Secretaries of GCAH, to receive gifts, bequests, and other funds to support the work of the Historical Society of The United Methodist Church. To donate send a check to Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., 950 Willow Valley Lake Dr 1-106, Willow Street, PA 17584.

*Includes A Life Membership (\$500.00) From Robert Sledge

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 P. O. Box 2313
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