

HISTORICAL BULLETIN

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from our PRESIDENT

The Rev. Dr. Richard Waugh



from our GENERAL SECRETARY

The Rev. Alfred T. Day III



WESLEYAN GLOBAL MISSION EXPANSION

Greetings to all supporters of the World Methodist Historical Society.

I would like to share with you some comments on Wesleyan global mission expansion. In the English-speaking world, it has been claimed that Methodism became the most important religious movement of both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Beyond its beginnings in Great Britain, it was influential globally, especially in North America. By the end of the nineteenth century less than 10 percent of all Methodists lived in Great Britain, with the vast majority of the spiritual descendants of John and Charles Wesley spread around the world.

John Wesley was always an activist; through spiritual introspection, fervent preaching, prolific writing, and busily organising the growing Methodist movement. Wesley believed he had rediscovered the driving force of holy love for passionate mission, and its sanctifying reality, available in this life, for the transformation of persons, communities, and the whole of creation. It was a powerful message for all people regardless of socio-economic situation, culture, or language.

In 1739, soon after his “warmed heart” experience, his famous words, “I look upon all the world as my parish” were an expression of his missionary focussed theology. Many years later, and shortly before his death, he commented, “The Methodists are to spread life among all denominations . . .” Such

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BRIDGEWORK

I am thinking about the passion for history that brings us together as The World Methodist Historical Society:

At its annual meeting just past, The United Methodist General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH) traveled to Historic St. Georges UMC, Philadelphia, PA (see links below). It was a great day at one of the seminal churches in American Methodism, the place that greeted Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor—John Wesley’s first missionaries from across the pond (1769). A few years later Francis Asbury, destined to become one of the very first Methodist bishops in the emergent Methodist Episcopal Church preached his first sermon here (1771). History radiates from floor to ceiling and pew to a classic tub pulpit in this oldest Methodist Church building in the USA.

One of St. George’s defining stories is not about its significant place in Methodist beginnings but how this great church almost met its end. In the 1920s a change in neighborhood demographics caused a near-deadly decline in church membership—from a thousand people per Sunday to fewer than fifty. This state of affairs led The Delaware River Bridge Commission to conclude that St. George’s would be uncontested collateral damage when plans for a new bridge linking Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Camden, New Jersey came off the drawing board. St. George’s stood in the path of the bridge and progress demanded demolition. If the church building disappeared, few if any would miss it. Or care in the least.

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ecumenical and all-embracing mission gave early Methodists a determination which matched the changing times of the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century.

Ireland was the first area of Methodist overseas mission work. Preaching places were established in the late 1740s by lay leaders. Eventually John and Charles Wesley and many other itinerant Methodists were to frequently visit, and Irish Methodism became strong and effective. The work of lay people, women and men, was important from the beginning—and a continuing feature in the establishment of missionary Methodism all over the world. The growth of the American work from the 1760s was especially dramatic.

In 1783, Dr Thomas Coke, Wesley's prominent assistant in England, published a paper titled, "A Plan of the Society for the Establishment of Missions amongst the Heathens." By 1786, Coke had gathered support and set sail for Newfoundland, but due to Atlantic storms his ship went to Antigua in the Caribbean. Coke was surprised to find Methodist work already established there, began in 1759 by a layman, Nathaniel Gilbert, who had heard Wesley preach in London. By the time of Coke's visit, there were 1,500 Methodists, only three of whom were Caucasian, with indigenous leadership strongly evident.

The work of early missionary-minded Methodists preceded the work of other denominational mission societies established in the 1790s, like the Baptists, London Missionary Society, and the Church Missionary Society. In fact, the Methodist movement was missionary in its ethos and organisation from its very beginnings.

Lay Methodists arrived in America after experiencing spiritual renewal in England. The freedoms of the new environment gave them ready ability to preach and teach and be influential. But the revolutionary war of the 1760s and 1770s created tensions between the British and American churches. Nonetheless Methodist missionaries were sent from England by the annual conference in 1769, including Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor (read about Rev. Fred Day's mention of Boardman and Pilmoor and their association with St George's Church in Philadelphia). In 1784, after wrestling through the issues, Wesley finally ordained Dr. Thomas Coke, Richard Whatcoat, and Thomas Vasey, for service in America and instructed Coke to ordain Francis Asbury who had ministered there for many years. This ordination initiative was a further step in separating Methodism from its Church of England origins. In fact, by the end of his life, Wesley had ordained more than 25 men to work overseas, not only in America, but in Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and the West Indies.

In many ways Methodism, with its youthful vigour and flexible organisation, was well matched to the ideals of the growing American republic. Whereas British Methodism was compelled to develop within the constraints of English class culture and

an established Church environment, American Methodism experienced few boundaries in a huge land of new opportunity. At the time of the American "Christmas Conference" of 1784 there were only a few thousand Methodists; by 1820 about 250,000, by 1850 500,000, and by 1843 over 1,000,000. As well as the new and fresh context being influential, growth was due to other factors such as purposeful leadership with a new episcopacy, women given some responsibilities, overt evangelistic work, and, in the early years, the remarkable effectiveness of circuit riding preachers reaching into almost every part of every state.

As in so many other places, early beginnings in Southern Africa were with lay people, who in this case were Methodist soldiers. Soon after, British Methodist missionaries, Barnabas and Jane Shaw, established themselves in Cape Town from 1816 and eventually built a strong network of Christian witness in the southern part of the continent. Early Methodist work in East and Central Africa was strengthened by British missionaries who promoted evangelism and education.

The Wesleyan Methodist Conference in Great Britain from about 1813 encouraged the forming of district missionary societies and these became a fitting legacy of the good work of Thomas Coke. In 1818, the conference formed the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. The new society had a big challenge and worked to raise missionary funds throughout the circuits of Great Britain.

An early appeal to the newly formed missionary society was for help to establish and grow Methodist work in Australia and the South Pacific. Work had already begun in Sydney by schoolteachers establishing class meetings. Missionary Rev. Samuel Leigh was sent from England and arrived in Australia in 1815, the first ordained Wesleyan minister in the region. Despite vast distances, work was expanded all over the continent with many more societies, circuits, and schools established. Methodism eventually became Australia's third largest denomination. In 1819, Leigh spent time in New Zealand and later established a Wesleyan mission there in 1822, helped by his wife Catherine and other lay leaders. Work focussed on evangelisation of the indigenous Maori people, but later shifted to focus on the European settlers after 1840. As in Australia, New Zealand Methodism became well established.

In the Pacific Islands, British missionaries, via Australia and New Zealand, commenced work from the early 1820s. The island nation of Tonga was the first to adopt Christianity and Methodism has dominated ever since. Mission work extended to Fiji in the early 1830s, mostly by Pacific Island lay evangelists, and became the main Christian presence. In Samoa, Methodism became well-established, along with other Christian traditions. Methodist work began in New Britain in 1875 and the Solomon Islands in 1902; the latter by Australian Methodists, led by both Pacific Island lay evangelists and trained missionaries.

Although John Wesley had no biological children, his spiritual

children are vast in number. Methodism was the most dynamic world missionary movement of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, and among the most important Protestant religious developments since the Reformation.

Distinctively, lay men and women always had prominent roles. The movement's salvation and sanctification emphases, applicable for all people groups, made for a powerful Christian message of proclamation and an influential call to holy living and social transformation.

In many parts of the world the Methodist/Wesleyan advance coincided with the rise of modernity and economic prosperity. This was especially so for Great Britain and the United States of America, whose churches organised so much missionary work.

In the twentieth century, the Methodist/Wesleyan work and witness developed into more established churches, often accompanied by the development of sophisticated educational and social service programmes. At the same time, signs of numerical Methodist decline became apparent, sometimes masked by overall population increase and church unions. Whatever the circumstances, the Methodist movement was always activist; promoting holy love—of God and neighbour.

In the context of this global expanse of the John Wesley family of churches, we offer this World Methodist Historical Society bulletin. Please contribute to this important means of global communication.

In Christian Service,
Richard Waugh
Auckland, New Zealand
November 3, 2017

-WMHS-

Historical Bulletin is the newsletter of the WMHS. Currently it is being published on an annual basis in an electronic format. Apology is offered to those who are not able to access electronic resources but availability through the internet allows for much wider distribution globally. It also allows the Society to eliminate dues, the payment of which was very inconvenient for those outside the United States. There are two ways to see the current bulletin: it is posted on the GCAH website at <http://archives.gcah.org/handle/10516/1151> or you can sign up for email distribution by contacting Michelle Merkel-Brunskill, Executive Assistant at the General Commission on Archives and History, at mmerkel@gcah.org. All past issues are also available at <http://archives.gcah.org/xmlui/handle/10516/1151>.

-WMHS-

(Day continued from page one)



Here is where one of the most important words in history and theology comes into play: “BUT.” St. George’s was marked for demolition BUT a small group of leaders, with the help of Bishop Thomas Neely, fought a battle in the courts that eventually saved St. George’s from the wrecking ball. The settlement moved the path of the bridge a mere 18 feet. Since that time, Historic St. George’s, for all its colonial renown, has been known as “the church that moved the bridge.” To this day visitors to St. George’s are amazed by the church’s extremely close proximity to car and train traffic steadily whooshing by.

Ah, what a fascinating story! It charms tourists and intrigues historians. BUT, I am telling you this tale as more than its example of a few of the faithful beating the big, bad system. For church archivists and historians there is a more powerful message and teachable moment.

St. George’s may well be the church that moved the bridge— BUT concerning the work of history, the reverse of that phrase is even more revealing. *The work of history is a bridge that moves the Church.*

The work of The General Commission on Archives and History, respective conference archives and Methodist Historical Societies around the world is a labor of connection traversing Wesleyan and Methodists rich legacy, spanning the challenges of this and every time. It is supported by piers and pylons sunk deeply into the core of our “people called Methodist” DNA. The work of history is a bridge crossing rivers or chasms leading to the other sides where God is forever calling the faithful with all that has been bequeathed to us in tow.

We live in a time when there is more talk of building walls than bridges, more fear about being stuck in gridlock rather than seeing a way across or through.

Many people think the work we archivists and historians do is gathering and collecting old stuff and putting it on shelves. We spend our time, they fancy, dealing more in warm, fuzzy nostalgia than the very stuff of well-grounded passages to new life.

Here at the United Methodist Archives and the work you do in archives and history wherever you are—WE are bridge builders. Thank God for the reach of your efforts that may not be fully realized in our life and times.

As we like to say, by understanding the past, The General Commission on Archives and History helps the Church engage the present and envision the future.

The thing about bridges They were built so that crossing-over can happen. So let's never give up. Let's keep up the back-and-forth. Let's keep on walking and working together.

Rev. Alfred T. Day
Madison, New Jersey
November 1, 2017

<http://www.historicstgeorges.org/>
<http://www.gcah.org/research/travelers-guide/historic-st.-georges-united-methodist-church>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPNfjLqsl5o>

-WMHS-

THE AUSTRALASIAN CENTRE FOR WESLEYAN RESEARCH CONFERENCE (ACWR)

The ACWR promotes and supports research on the life, work and times of John and Charles Wesley, their historical and theological antecedents, their successors in the Wesleyan tradition, and contemporary scholarship in the Wesleyan tradition. This includes areas such as theology, biblical studies, history, education, ethics, literature, mission, cultural studies, philosophy, pastoral studies, worship, preaching, practical theology, and social theology.

Currently the ACWR is a working partnership formed by a number of Wesleyan theological institutions, one denominational partner, and two Uniting Church library collections.

- Nazarene Theological College (Church of the Nazarene, Brisbane, Australia)
- Kingsley Australia (Wesleyan Methodist, Melbourne, Australia)
- Booth College (Salvation Army, based in Sydney, Australia)
- Catherine Booth College (Salvation Army, Melbourne, Australia)
- Booth College of Mission (Salvation Army, based in Wellington, New Zealand)
- Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary (Church of the Nazarene, Manila, Philippines)
- The Wesleyan Methodist Church of New Zealand
- Camden Theological Library (Uniting Church, Centre for Ministry, Sydney, Australia)

- The Sugden Heritage Collections (Uniting Church, Queen's College, University of Melbourne, Australia)

Each centre provides quality resources for students and researchers in this field. ACWR is actively seeking to enlarge our range of partners throughout Australia and New Zealand, as well as further afield.

Global Wesleyanism Theme

The eighth annual conference of ACWR was held at the Salvation Army College in Wellington, New Zealand, October 2-3, 2017 with a "Global Wesleyanism" theme.

There are over 70 million people in the world who identify as "Methodist" and many millions more who self-describe as "Wesleyan." A recovery of the Wesleyan origins of significant movements such as Pentecostalism, and The Salvation Army is presently undergoing a renewal of interest.

This Conference attempted a snapshot of this significant global movement. How is the Wesleyan tradition in dialogue with contemporary Biblical scholarship? Where does the Wesleyan movement fit in the shift in Christianity's centre of gravity to the Global South? Where are signs of Wesleyan renewal around the world? How does John Wesley's ideal of a "Catholic Spirit" inform a post-ecumenical age?

Rev. Dr. Richard Waugh, the new President of the World Methodist Historical Society, was the keynote speaker at the conference, presenting three papers; 1. Overview of John Wesley's life and ministry and description of Wesleyan global expansion during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and into the South Pacific. 2. Context for Wesleyan evangelism in Aotearoa/New Zealand. 3. Five "Wesleyan DNA" touchstones for mission today.

Others presenters and topics included; Rev. Emman Chapman on, "The Sanctified Addict?" Rev. Dr. Peter Dobson on "Candidate Perspectives on Ordination Candidacy in the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia," Rev. Pam Reed on, "Misheard Words? Making Sense of the Language of Sanctification in Postmodern Society," and Rev. Dr. Glen O'Brien on, "Liberty and Loyalty in the Long Eighteenth-Century: A Global History Approach."

Contact:

For ACWR contact: the Director is: Dr Dean Smith dsmith@ntc.edu.au 40 Woodlands Drive, Thornlands QLD 4164, Australia. The Secretary is Reverend Associate Professor Glen A. O'Brien glenaobrien@acwr.edu.au.

-WMHS-

**WRITING TO WESLEY:
TRANSCRIBING EARLY METHODIST TESTIMONIES**

The Heritage Committee of the British Methodist Church is supporting an innovative digital project to transcribe a collection of 155 testimonies from early Methodist converts of the eighteenth century. The testimonies, which were written as personal letters to Charles Wesley, are part of the Connexional Archives of British Methodism, held at the University of Manchester John Rylands Library. The letters have been known to academics for many years, but the British Connexion, in partnership with the University, is using them to engage a wider public in their content.

The letters are largely from unknown, “ordinary” people, not the more famous names of the movement, and many are by women, which makes them particularly unusual. They provide a fascinating insight into the lives and private worlds of these little-known first Methodists; we read about their spiritual struggles, in vivid eighteenth-century colour, with all their joys and sorrows, the moments of doubt and crisis, as well as rapture and assurance. Some of the letters touch (indeed dwell, in some cases) on theological debates of the day; Christian Perfection, Arminianism versus Calvinism and so on. Others offer a simple account of the author’s journey to faith, often from a self-confessed shallow religious observance to a deep and vibrant conviction.

The letters have been digitised by the University, so transcribers work from home, downloading the material and returning transcripts to the Methodist Heritage Officer, who is coordinating the project for the Church. Multiple transcripts are required for each letter, in order to create a definitive transcript, which will join the digitised letters on the University website. More than sixty people across Britain (including a small number based in other countries) have volunteered to transcribe at least one letter, although several have completed many more. The project will continue throughout 2018.

More details, including how to get involved, may be found here: www.methodistheritage.org.uk/earlymethodistvolume.htm.

Owen Roberts
Methodist Heritage Officer
November, 2017

-WMHS-

**NEW MUSEUM AND VISITOR CENTER
AT THE NEW ROOM**

In June, 2017, British Methodism celebrated the opening of a new museum and visitor centre at The New Room, the oldest Methodist place of worship in the world. The new museum features 12 rooms telling the story of the Wesleys and their work

in Bristol and beyond. The new library and archive contains a wealth of books, magazines and artefacts and anyone who wants to use the research facilities is invited to contact the Collections Manager Kate Rogers via collections@newroombristol.org.uk

Looking ahead, the Wesley Historical Society is planning a conference on the theme “Methodism and Politics” in Cambridge, England, June 22-23, 2018. For further information, please contact the conference secretary, Clive Norris, at whsconference2018@gmail.com.

Martin Wellings
Past President of the WMHS

-WMHS-

**MARKING THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION
IN GERMANY**

In Germany, the Reformation anniversary was a huge event. Beginning in 2009, the “Evangelical Church in Germany” (a federation of 20 independent Lutheran, Reformed and United regional churches) prepared the event with annual main topics to focus on: confession (2009), education (2010), freedom (2011), music (2012), toleration (2013), politics (2014), images and Bible (2015), and the one world (2016).

After much discussion about “to whom the Reformation belongs,” most “regional churches” (“*Landeskirchen*”) created their own ecumenical projects. Also the National Council of Churches created statements that were locally discussed in congregations. Conferences highlighted the meaning and influence of the Reformation while others underlined the need of a continual reformation process in the church that is an ongoing demand during the centuries since the church became state acknowledged. As Methodists (organized as Free Church in Germany) we were often involved in ecumenical conferences and publishing projects. It was and is still a challenge to explain our relationship to the Reformation at all, especially to John Wesley’s view on Martin Luther or other central reformation topics like separation of church and state, religious freedom, authentic witness, the diaconal and mission commandment of the church.

Finally, from my perspective, it was a challenge to say in an ecumenical spirit what we share as well as what is different and distinct. It was helpful profiling as Methodists focus on Wesleyan Methodist sources like John Wesley’s Standard sermons and Charles Wesley’s hymns as lyrical theology. All that strengthened our special approach to the gospel in the choir of other denominational understandings and accents.

After the huge German Protestant *Kirchentag* (Church Congress) in May this year in Berlin and Wittenberg with special programs in “Luther-Cities” (*Lutherstädte*) as Erfurt,

Eisenach, Halle, Leipzig there were—according to the 95 theses that Luther drew up—95 days with an ongoing church program in Wittenberg. Each week had another main interest and lots of activities. For this little town and a mainly secular context this meant a huge challenge. It was comprehensible that inhabitants sometimes groaned about the Christian invasion—especially when roads were closed, parking lots were untraceable and no normal life ensued for months in this normally quiet little town.

But maybe those who live there became—besides sometimes being overextended by the visitors and events—inspired and thoughtful provoking by topics and encounters they haven't heard before. And maybe the many Christian travelers behaved in ways mirroring God's grace so that observers were inspired to think and ask for the reason and learned about God.

I pray that the reformation of churches and individual hearts happens.

Dr. Ulrike Schuler
Past President of the WMHS

For a bibliography of the most recent publications on the reformation by Dr. Schuler, please contact her at:
ulrike.schuler@emk.de.

-WMHS-

**NEWS FROM THE EUNICE HUNTER MEMORIAL
LIBRARY –RESOURCE CENTRE
OF THE WMHS IN AUSTRALIA**

Daryl Lightfoot / Sue Pacey

The 2016 Newsletter included a background to the development of the Eunice Hunter Memorial Library as the WMHS Resource Centre in Australia in association with the Ferguson Memorial Library (Archives of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW). This association also provides public liability insurance coverage for our WMHS work.

Being located at a distance from the Archives of both the Presbyterian and Uniting Churches in NSW, our WMHS Resource Centre also provides an element of disaster recovery for both repositories which is clearly necessary in an increasingly uncertain world. An example of the need for such a strategy emerged during the year when under extreme weather conditions water penetrated a section of the lower floor of the Uniting Church Archives in Sydney.

Research on the Biographical Register of nurses who served with the Australian Inland Mission (AIM) continues. We have seen some quite incredible and unexpected outcomes as a direct consequence of this work over the past three months by way of reunions of a number of former AIM nurses and also Presbyterian Deaconesses who had not been in contact with each other in some cases for well over 50 years. Our submission

for the 2017 Newsletter is in fact a direct consequence of this research and demonstrates our approach to a dynamic ministry of archives and history which goes well beyond mere record processing or academic research.

A few weeks ago we came into contact with Sister Heather Chew, a former nurse with the AIM at remote Halls Creek in the East Kimberley region of Western Australia over the years 1960-1962 and learned something of her fascinating life story. Following completion of her term at Halls Creek,



Sister Chew (pictured recently above aged 82) had offered to serve with the Australian Methodist Overseas Missions (MOM) and for some months in 1963 relieved another Australian missionary nurse on furlough from her post as a fraternal worker with the American Methodist Missions in Sarawak in Borneo.



Thus it was that we first learned something of the incredible life story of Sister Sophie M. Stronach, a “devout Presbyterian” (pictured above c1930). Sister Stronach joined MOM in 1940, and then served in India through the difficult years until independence, followed by service in a pioneering situation in the “New Villages” in Perak in North Malaya during the communist insurgency under contract with the Women's Division of Christian Service of the American Methodist Church. At the conclusion of the emergency in Malaya in 1960, Sophie was approached by American Methodist Bishop Hobart B. Amstutz, President of the Conferences of Burma, Sumatra, Malaya (English, Tamil, and Chinese), and also Sarawak, to undertake yet another pioneering assignment in medical work in establishing medical services in Tulai, a remote area of south west Sarawak.

On December 1, 1960, Stronach arrived at her new station via the Rejang, Binatang, and Tulai Rivers, the last mile as pillion passenger on a motor bike. Here she also served initially in a situation of political unrest as the communist insurgency had not yet ended in Sarawak, and in 1963 she concluded an article in the MOM *Missionary Review* with the challenge “Will it be Christ or communism in the lands at our country’s front door?”

With plans for an autonomous Conference for the four former Malaysian Conferences in August, 1968 nearing fruition, Stronach’s long held hopes and prayers for her replacement at Tulai were answered by the appointment of an experienced Foochow speaking Chinese Christian nurse whose arrival was anticipated in mid-May 1968. Her missionary task completed, she then proceeded to Britain and the USA to study healing centres and ministry of holistic healing in response to yet another Divine call to a healing ministry here at home in Australia. Sophie Stronach’s home-call came in November, 2016 at the great age of 104 years.

We have given prominence over the past decade to the celebration of peace and the end—however temporary—of international armed conflict. Our first major initiative in this area was a seminar held with the co-operation of our Baptist Historical Society friends in 2008, the papers presented being subsequently published in a limited edition monograph under the title *O Valiant Hearts*. Remembrance Day in November, 2015 was also commemorated by a similar event in Sydney and in Newcastle under the title *We Will Remember Them*.

In September, 2016, a history of Australian and Armenian relations was launched under the title *Armenia, Australia, and the Great War*. This volume focused extensively on the events during and immediately after the Great War which have come to be known as “the Armenian Genocide.” Australia was deeply involved in the post-war international recovery effort through various agencies, and the churches played a key role.



This recovery effort was headed up by an American-born Congregational Minister, Rev. Dr. Loyal Lincoln Wirt, (pictured above in Newcastle [NSW] in 1901), where he ministered for some years prior to returning to the USA. He then joined the National Lyceum and Chautauqua Movement and later served on the Western Front with the International Red Cross in WWI. Returning to the USA, Wirt was then “head-hunted” to become

leader of the relief operation to assist Armenian and other persecuted Christians in Turkey which became known as Near East Relief (NER). In 1921, Wirt was appointed International Commissioner of NER and in this role returned to Australia and New Zealand in 1922. Here he promoted the establishment of an Australasian orphanage which opened at Antilyas (Syria) in November, 1922.

A detailed “Occasional Paper” was published on the life, ministry, and legacy of Rev. Dr. Loyal Wirt in February, 2017, including in its sub-title reference to John Wesley’s well-known assertion that “The world is my parish,” which Wirt later took as the title for his own autobiography. We have recently received a request from one of the co-authors of the 2016 history to accept the task of researching and writing the definitive biography of Rev. Dr. Loyal Lincoln Wirt.

The 40th anniversary of the inauguration of the Uniting Church in Australia was recognized during June, 2017 with special services across the nation, and was also marked by the publication of *Burning—or Bushed*, a retrospective collection of essays on the post-1977 Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Australia has been deeply divided for some time on the subject of same sex marriage and a voluntary plebiscite is being held nationally on possible changes to the current Marriage Act. Related questions include the position of clergy and marriage celebrants, who in Australia act primarily as servants of the State in respect of marriages, and their freedom to decline to perform marriages of same sex couples. (Current law defines “marriage” as the union of a man and a woman, consistent with the Biblical position.) Brothers and sisters, pray for us!

-WMHS-

SOUTH PACIFIC HISTORICAL SYMPOSIUM: MAY 24-25, 2019

Submitted by Rev. Dr. Richard Waugh

As briefly mentioned in my Wesleyan global mission expansion introduction, there is coming up in May, 2019, a special historical symposium in the South Pacific, organised by the Wesley Historical Society (NZ), within the Methodist Church of New Zealand, Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa, together with the Wesleyan Methodist Church of New Zealand and the Church of the Nazarene in New Zealand.

The topic will be: Methodism in Aotearoa: origins and impact and the historical symposium will be held at Auckland’s St Johns College on May 24-25, 2019. Wesley Day 2019 seems a fitting time for the conference as it coincides with 200 years since the arrival in New Zealand of the Rev. Samuel Leigh, the

first Wesleyan-ordained minister in the South Pacific. Leigh was sent from England and arrived in Sydney in 1815. At the invitation of Rev. Samuel Marsden, the prominent Church of England missionary, Leigh visited New Zealand in mid-1819 and later in 1822 established the Wesleyan Mission, called Wesleydale, at Whangaroa.

The Friday programme (May 24) will encompass reflections on:

- i. the “British Scene” out of which grew Missionary endeavour;
- ii. the interface between the missions in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands;
- iii. the wider New Zealand context leading to the establishment of the Wesleyan Whangaroa Mission at Kao in 1822;
- iv. Leigh and the 1822 Wesleyan Mission, its relationship to the context and an evaluation of its impact on missionary endeavour in Aotearoa.

Saturday’s programme will focus on the ongoing impact of the mission’s establishment, and will possibly include a panel discussion/reflection on what had been expressed in the symposium; invited responses to keynotes and presentations and an examination of what trends are emerging in Wesleyan/Methodist witness in the present age.

Papers contributed to the Symposium will be edited and published as part of the 2022 commemorations. If any reader has expertise in these areas and would like their lecture to be considered, please contact as soon as possible: Rev. Ian Faulkner: ian.faulkner2017@gmail.com.

-WMHS-

“GREAT MEN, WOMEN AND OTHER UNSUNG HEROES: MINISTRY WITH THE TAMILS”

by Rev. Malcolm T.H. Tan

**Chairman, Board of Archives & History (TRAC)
The Methodist Church in Singapore**

Methodism has been in Singapore for 132 years since February 7, 1885, when missionary William Oldham was appointed pastor of the first congregation by Dr. James Thoburn, then Presiding Elder of the South India Missionary Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. A series of public evangelistic meetings in the Town Hall resulted in enough enquirers, converts and supporters for the first Methodist society to be organized on February 23, 1885. Oldham was the pastor of this original congregation, made up primarily of British merchants, soldiers and Eurasians. Hence, it was referred to as the English Church, before its later change of name to Wesley Church.



William Oldham (1854-1937)

Seeing a mixture of racial groups in Singapore, Oldham realised the need for linguistic missions within the Methodist Mission. Since the early evangelistic meeting days in the Town Hall, Oldham had already encountered Tamilians from Ceylon, thus, being made aware of their presence. Four of them answered the Altar Call in those early meetings. It was natural for Oldham to be drawn to their migrant worker community, since he was born and raised in the Subcontinent and could speak their language. Tamilians in Singapore came from either Ceylon or Tamil Nadu in South India. Most were traders, labourers or convicts. Consequently, Oldham started the Anglo-Tamil School in 1885. He also visited the nearby prison in Pearls Hill to preach to the Tamil prisoners. It was his friendship with Tamil merchants in Singapore which inspired the idea of the Tamil Girls’ School in August, 1887. This was Methodism’s first school for girls. It was initiated by Tamil businessmen who made donations of cash and kind to provide for the education of their daughters under the supervision of the newly arrived Sophia Blackmore, the first woman missionary for Methodism in Singapore. In 1894, the Tamil Girls’ School was renamed the Methodist Girls’ School (MGS) when girls from other racial communities were also admitted into the school.

There is a need to move away from the “great man” approach to writing history and acknowledge that Oldham could not have accomplished so much on the mission field alone. His genius was his ability to raise supporters and fellow workers to help in missionary labour. In fact, Oldham had no problems raising up native Asian Christian workers to help him reach out to their own people, thus, promoting indigenization from the very start.

Consequently, he appointed Benjamin Pillai to help him in conducting regular worship services for Tamilians in the prison, in their native tongue. Methodist regional connexionalism helped to provide the first Catechist, M. Gnanamuthu, sent from the Tamil Methodist community in Rangoon, Burma by their Superintendent Rev. J. E. Robinson, who responded quickly to Oldham’s Macedonian call for help. Gnanamuthu arrived promptly in September, 1885. It was he who helped Oldham start the Anglo-Tamil School with an initial intake of almost 45 students. Regular informal Sunday and weekday services in Tamil were conducted by December, 1885.

Oldham was also able to look beyond Methodism to get labourers for the Harvest field. Through his friendship with W. W. Howland, a Congregational missionary serving among the Tamilians of Jaffna Ceylon under the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), a Tamil Preacher/Evangelist C. W. Underwood was sent to serve under the Singapore Methodist Mission in 1887. Sadly, Underwood passed away unexpectedly in February, 1890 from pneumonia, and according to some, also from exhaustion due to overwork.



C. W. Underwood (Died Feb 1890)

In the three short years serving in Singapore, Underwood greatly strengthened Tamil evangelistic outreach. He assisted Gnanamuthu in the Anglo-Tamil School for boys and was active in the Prison Ministry as well. His evangelistic zeal to Tamils in Singapore was so well-known, that, one day, some detractors came and brought a donkey to him. They reminded him that Jesus rode on a donkey and asked him to do likewise for all to see, in the hope that he would look foolish. According to the 1890 Conference Minutes: “He continued preaching Christ to the people at that place until the very men who had brought the beast began to inquire the way of Salvation.” In his brief time in Singapore, he preached everywhere tirelessly and led 14 persons to the waters of Baptism and Christian Profession.

As soon as he arrived in Singapore in early 1887, Underwood started preaching in Tamil to Tamilians and organized the Tamil Methodist Church, making him the first Tamil Methodist pastor in Singapore. This was the second Methodist church to be organized on the island. He was also the first local missionary from Singapore to cross the Straits of Johore. He was passionate about starting a ministry to the Tamil labourers in the tea estates of Perak. In fact, Conference records show a budget of \$250 allotted for “Underwood’s Mission to Perak” in April, 1889. Bishop Thoburn recorded in his journal that Underwood travelled north by sea with him from Singapore to the island of Penang before travelling alone by land in the Peninsula to Perak, the usual travel route then. The Conference appointed Underwood as Mission Evangelist to Tamil plantation workers in Perak after he returned from this 1889 trip. Alas it was not to be. Underwood suddenly went home to Glory in February, 1890, while preparing to leave for Jaffna, Ceylon to attend his daughter’s wedding.



Sophia Blackmore (1857-1945)

Much has been made of the fact that Sophia Blackmore launched the Tamil Girls’ School on August 15, 1887, with nine little Tamil girls. The Tamil Girls’ School was later renamed the Methodist Girls’ School, making 2017 the 130th anniversary of MGS Singapore. It is indeed, a year of great celebrations.

Sophia Blackmore only arrived in Singapore in mid-July 1887. She had little time to make preparations or to do the groundwork for the launch of the school. It should be acknowledged that much had already been done by Mrs. Oldham in making valuable contact with supporters. Also, Underwood came a little earlier in 1887 and formally organized the first Tamil Methodist Church, thereby producing the institutional forerunner for the school. “Underwood began working in early 1887 among his own people and soon formed the Tamil Church and helped Miss Blackmore to get the Tamil Girls’ School started in August that year” (Ernest Lau, *From Mission to Church* [Singapore: Armour Publishing, 2008], 33). No wonder Sophia Blackmore had this to say about that first day of school:

By August 15, 1887, all was ready and we had our opening day. Mrs Oldham made a few appropriate remarks and offered prayer for God’s blessing on our venture. The Tamil gentlemen were glad that a beginning was being made towards bringing the benefits of an education to their girls. The Tamil preacher, Mr. Underwood by name, hovered over all with a smile of satisfaction.

(T. R. Doraisamy, *Sophia Blackmore in Singapore* [Singapore: General Conference Women’s Society of Christian Service, The Methodist Church in Singapore, 1987], 12.)

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OFFICERS 2016-2021

President: Rev. Dr. Richard Waugh, QSM, PO Box 82-363, Highland Park,
Auckland 2143, New Zealand

rjw@wesleyan.org.nz

Vice-Presidents:

AFRICA:

Beauty Maenzenise, Zimbabwe
Lauren Matthew, Methodist Church of South Africa

rosebeau3@yahoo.com
lollidubes@gmail.com

AMERICAS:

Paulo Mattos, Rua L'ondrina, 410 Apt. 113, Rudge Ramos, 09635-100- San Bernardo, SP, Brazil

payresmattos@yahoo.com

Marilyn Fardig Whiteley, 226 Exhibition St., Guelph, Ontario NIH 4R5, Canada

mwhiteley@gto.net

ASIA:

Lung-Kwong Lo, 9/F Methodist House, 36 Hennessy Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong
Rev. Malcolm T. H. Tan, 11 Blackmore Drive, Singapore 599986, Republic of Singapore

lklohkg@yahoo.com
malcolm.t.h.tan@ccmc.org.sg

EUROPE; GREAT BRITAIN / IRELAND

Judith Lakatos, Hungary
Sarah Friswell, Methodist Church in Britain
Ian Henderson, Methodist Church in Ireland

lakatos.judit@methodista.hu
sarah.friswell@btinternet.com
roshend@eircom.net

OCEANIA:

Daryl Lightfoot, P. O. Box 574, Toronto 2283 NSW, Australia

dlightfoot@pcnsw.org.au

MEMBERS-AT-LARGE:

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pchilcot@ashland.edu
johnahargreaves@blueyonder.co.uk
john@jnandcsenton.plus.com
martin.wellings@oxfordmethodists.org.uk
studiengemeinschaft@emk.de

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT: Dr. Ulrike Schuler, Mörrike Str. 18, 72762
Reutlingen, Germany

ulrike.schuler@emk.de

GENERAL SECRETARY: Rev. Alfred T. Day, III, PO Box 127, Madison, NJ 07940 USA

atday@gcah.org

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com

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kkhusc@comcast.net

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Mary K. Calkin, 701 Oaknoll Drive #433, Iowa City, IA 52246-5168, USA

HISTORICAL BULLETIN

WORLD METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P. O. Box 127, Madison, NJ 07940, USA