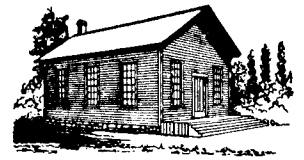




"WE are the end-product of our history."

FLASHBACKS



Revealing glimpses of our creative past

Official newsletter of the
UNITED METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN

Vol. 10 No. 2

May, 1983

'T is greatly wise to talk with our past hours
And ask them what report they bore to heaven.

Edward Young

Night Thoughts ii

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FALL PILGRIMAGE

The 1983 Fall Historical Pilgrimage has been scheduled for Saturday, October 1, at Kenosha. The Wisconsin Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized at Southport (Kenosha) on July 12, 1884, which is 135 years ago. The new conference covered the State of Wisconsin, which was also organized in 1884, plus the Territory of Minnesota. It has 57 appointments, and was divided into four Districts: Fond du Lac, Milwaukee, Racine and Platteville.

KENOSHA RECOMMENDED FOR PILGRIMAGE

Kenosha is to be recommended as the site for the 1983 annual historical pilgrimage; it was decided by the Executive Committee at a meeting held in Baraboo Saturday, April 16. The final decision will be made by the annual meeting of the United Methodist Historical Society of Wisconsin to be held in connection with the conference sessions on Friday evening, June 3 in Stevens Point. The recommended date for the observance is Saturday, October 1.

One hundred thirty-five years ago, beginning on May 1, 1848, Methodist preachers stationed within the boundaries of the new state gathered in Southport (now Kenosha) to organize the first annual conference to be formed within the boundaries of Wisconsin. Bishop Thomas A. Morris chaired the assembly, and at it close appointed 62 preachers to charges within the new judicatory. They were divided into four districts. A bit of Minnesota was also included within the jurisdiction of the new ecclesiastical body.

WOMEN'S HISTORY TO CONTINUE

In 1981 the position of coordinator of Women's History was suspended for lack of funds. A grant of \$80,000 from the General Council on Ministries to the General Commission on Archives will make its renewal possible for 1983 and 1984.

HISTORY IN MINIATURE

Try it for your Church

The eight page program of the Peace United Methodist Church in Richland Center for the dedication of their educational addition is excellent (although necessarily limited) presentation of their history, both world wide and local.

Included was a Litany of Thanksgiving

Mothers and Fathers in the Faith
Simon Peter, Mary Magdalene,
Francis of Assissi, Martin Luther,
John Wesley, and Susanna Wesley.

Awakeners of the Faith in America
Jacob Albright, Martin Boehm,
Phillip Otterbeim, Francis Asbury

Witnesses of Faith for All
Frances Willard, Herbert Welsh,
Jane Addams, Walter Rauschenbusch

Founders of the Faith in Wisconsin
John Clark, Alfred Brunson, Jennie
Harness Hatch, James Davis, Matthew
Simpson

Local Founders
J. H. Richards, John J. Richards,
Celina Richards, John Smelker,
Edwin Morris, William Minett,
Stella Benson, Lillian Webley,
George Webley, Mrs. William Minett,
J. R. Moon, C. S. Richards,
Mrs. Jennie Richards, Alice Blakeman

Six skits followed each presenting events that were meaningful.

OFFICE OF CHURCH LIBRARIAN

Legislation that would make the office of church librarian required is being submitted to the 1984 General Conference. Present disciplinary provisions make the office optional. This is the only major legislation proposed by the General Commission for 1984.

BOOKS FOR CHURCH LIBRARY

Church librarians should consider buying some of the books on ethnic majorities as listed in the May, 1983 DIMENSIONS, especially biographies for children and adults.

TIES OF METHODIST HISTORIANS SPAN YEARS

When Rev. Philo S. Bennett was writing his History of Methodism in Wisconsin (published in 1890) he could hardly have imagined that the great grandson of a friend would carry on and update that work 80 years later.

Bennett was at one time pastor in Norfolk, N. y.. One of the residents of Norfolk was Major General William Blake, and he and Bennett became good friends. Blake moved to Wisconsin in 1845 and Bennett four years later, in 1849. In pioneer Wisconsin the friendship was renewed. Bennett mentions it in his history on pages 81 and 90.

The next attempt to chronicle the history of the movement in the state was made by Rev. William Blake, the great grandson, in his book Cross and Flame in Wisconsin, published in 1973.

1784 -- FROM SOCIETY TO CHURCH

What is the real significance of the bicentennial celebration to be held throughout the United Methodist Church in 1984? It was not the beginning of the Methodist or Evangelical movement in America. That began in 1766 in New York and Maryland, with classes formed in both localities that year.

The year 1784 marked the beginning of the life of Methodism as a distinct Christian denomination, with ministers, congregations, and the sacraments. Prior to that year the movement consisted of a collection of religious societies formed within the Church of England to foster a deeper spiritual life among their members. The Rev. John Wesley was the initiator and leader. The movement was served by full time, trained religious workers, but they were lay people. Members of the classes and societies were encouraged to receive the sacraments in the parish churches of the Established Church.

The American Revolution brought a crisis. Most of the clergy left, either to return to England or to go with the loyalists to settle in Canada. William Warren Sweet described the plight of the Methodists: ". . . many of them had not partaken of the sacrament for years, while children of members were generally unbaptized." C. T. Winchester, in The Life of John Wesley, wrote, "among all the Methodists, there was not a single ordained priest who could minister to them the sacraments of the Church."

The Treaty of Paris, signed in September of 1783, severed all ties, political and ecclesiastical, between the American colonies and the mother country. Wesley failed in his efforts to have the English bishops ordain a bishop for America who could in turn ordain ministers. They also refused to ordain ministers to serve in the newly-independent country.

In this situation Wesley, had come to believe, following then recent biblical and historical scholarship, that in the primitive Church bishops were sometimes ordained by a presbytery (or gathering of elders), as in Alexandria, and decided to follow the example of these early Christians. Therefore, on September 2, 1784, in his own quarters in London, he, assisted by another minister, James Creighton, set apart Thomas Coke, an ordained presbyter, as "General superintendent" to preside over the American Methodist flock. That carried with it the authority to ordain ministers. He also ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey, first as deacons, and then as presbyters (or elders), and sent them, along with Coke, to assist the American Methodists. The trio reached New York November 3, 1784. They immediately conferred with the lay preachers of the societies there and in other parts of the newly-independent colonies. The preachers were called from all parts of the seaboard, and

assembled in Lovely Lane chapel. Baltimore, Maryland, for a conference. Chief among them was Francis Asbury, whom Wesley had previously sent to have charge of the work in America. The conference began at 10:00 a.m. on December 24, 1784, and lasted for ten days.

It determined to change the societies into the Methodist Episcopal Church, and ratified Wesley's choice of Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury to be the "general superintendents" -- bishops. Asbury was ordained by Coke, first as a deacon, then a presbyter or elder, and following that as "general superintendent" with authority to ordain ministers.

Sixty preachers participated in what has come to be known as the Christmas Conference. There were 84 preachers and 14,988 members in the societies at the time they were transformed into a Church. Twelve of the preachers were nominated by Coke and Asbury and confirmed by the conference to be ordained--first as deacons and then as elders, following the age-old practice of Christian tradition. Three others were given ordination as deacons. In the ordination of Asbury, a German Reformed pastor in Baltimore, Philip Otterbein, by Asbury's request, participated. Otterbein later became one of the founders of the United Brethren. The organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church occurred four years prior to the ratification of the federal constitution (1788) which established the United States of America.

This historic process is what we shall be celebrating in 1984 as we turn once again to our roots to understand our own identity.

Wm. Blake

FLASHBACKS

*Official newsletter of the United Methodist
Historical Society of Wisconsin*

Miss Margaret H. Scott, editor

1400 W. Seminary St., Richland Center, Wis. 53581

Material of historical interest, such as church anniversaries, recollections, activities of local church historical committees, and historians should be sent to her at the above address.

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