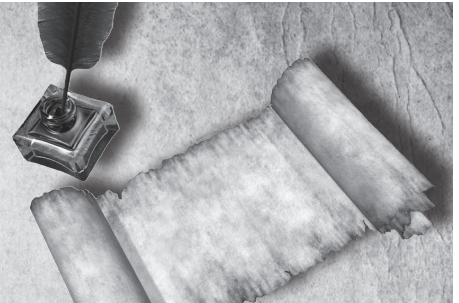


HISTORIAN'S DIGEST



Volume 52, Number 4

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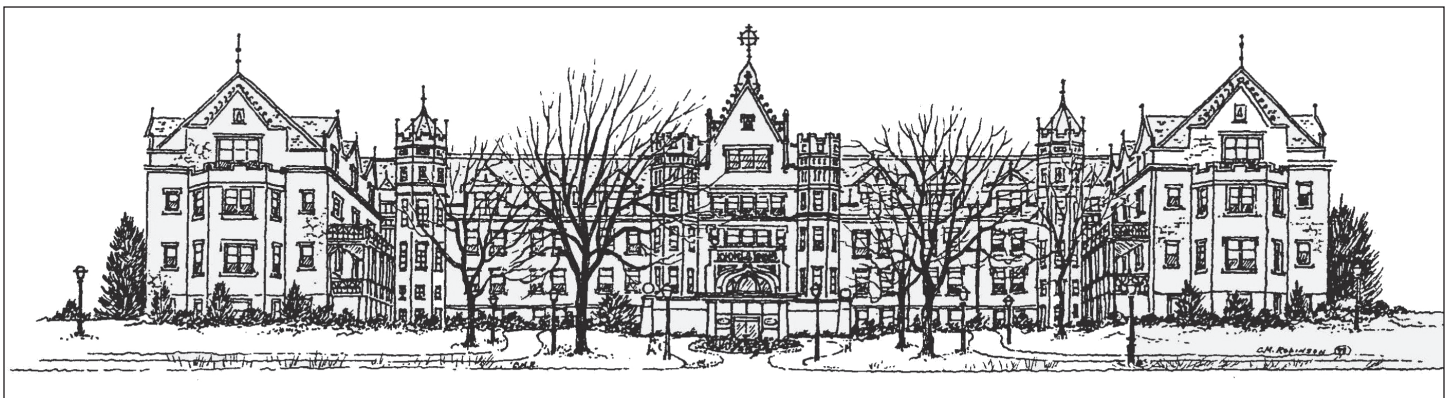
GCAH DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD HONORS HISTORIC ST. GEORGE'S AND MOTHER BETHEL AME

by Robert Williams, GCAH Secretary

The General Commission held its first annual meeting of the new quadrennium September 13-16, 2012. 21 of its 24 directors celebrated the continued existence of the commission. It elected Bishop Jeremiah Park, Resident Bishop of the Harrisburg Area comprising the Susquehanna Conference, as president; Dr. Beauty Maenzanise, Dean of the Faculty of Theology of Africa University as vice-president; and Nancy Watkins, Director of the Heritage Center for the Southeastern Jurisdiction as secretary. The Commission also reelected me as General Secretary. The full listing of commission members is available at www.gcah.org or the full link: http://www.gcah.org/site/c.ghKJI0PHIoE/b.3674283/k.76E5/General_Commission_Members.htm?sid=126639706.

In addition to adopting the budget for 2013, reviewing the work of the commission, and other governance issues, two highlights were the recognition of Simpson House, a continuing life care facility, as a Heritage Landmark; and the presentation of the Distinguished Service Award to Historic St. George's UMC and Mother Bethel AMEC for the Great Gathering of October 2009.

Simpson House is the oldest continuing care facility for aging persons in the Methodist tradition, having been founded immediately after the Civil War with its current iconic building, Olde Main, having been opened in 1899.



Simpson House "Olde Main" with New Entrance

A leading advocate for the facility was Mrs. Ellen Verner Simpson, wife of Bishop Matthew Simpson. A portrait of Mrs. Simpson that was found in a dormitory attic at Drew University was placed on indefinite loan to Simpson House so it will probably be seen and honor the role that Mrs. Simpson played in the early days of the House.

The other highlight was the recognition of the congregation of Mother Bethel joining in worship at Historic St. George's in October 2009. I made these remarks when the Distinguished Service Award was presented:

"Sometime between 1787 and 1792 Richard Allen and others walked out of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church because they were on the receiving end of discriminatory and demeaning acts by members of the church. On October 25, 2009, The Rev. Dr. Mark Tyler was the preacher and the congregation of Mother Bethel joined with their pastor in worshipping at Historic St. George's United Methodist Church. One time of worship
(cont. p. 3)



*Mother Bethel at St. George's October 2009
(photo by David Fonda)*

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submissions for the next issue is
January 1, 2013.

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From the President, Dan Swinson

Maybe it is time to revisit the frontier.

I have been re-reading Abel Stevens' *Life and Times of Nathan Bangs*, D. D. Bangs' early career was on the Canadian frontier between the Niagara and the Detroit rivers to the north of Lake Erie, on a line from Toronto southwest. In my prior reading, dating back to the 1970's, the book seemed to be about Bangs' life. True, the frontier history of Methodism as the tale of heroic circuit riders was under serious question by then. However, I was reading at University of Chicago for Gerald Brauer's course on American revivalism. Brauer saw revivalism through the lens of William G. McLaughlin (who concentrated on major evangelists from Edwards to Graham) for history and Mircea Eliade (role of leadership in history of religions) for theoretical framework. If anything, this focused my reading of the lives of frontier preachers like Bangs almost relentlessly on their perspectives.

The re-reading has happened in a different context. Over the past thirty years scholarship has focused much more on Martin Marty's classic question, "What's bugging the people?" Among scholars of American Methodism and historians of the frontiers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there are a host of characters with differing cultures, gender roles, work and life contexts, languages and folkways, etc. For example, Anne Durkin Keating of North Central College in Naperville, Illinois (a United Methodist related college and former home of Evangelical Theological Seminary) revisits the frontier birth of Chicago in *Up From Indian Country*. Her re-visioning of the "Fort Dearborn Massacre" as founding event in the city's history recounts the complex web of individuals, cultures, backgrounds, and expectations among the peoples of the *pays d'en haut* that both precede and follow the events of August, 1812. In a sense, to use Steven's distinction, the focus has shifted from *life* to *times*.

Back to Bangs. In a section entitled *Macedonian Call*, Bangs is serving the established Bay of Quinte circuit. He receives a letter from a German living in the far western section from the Thames River to Detroit, begging Bangs to bring the Gospel to the newly settled territory. Feeling he must have permission, in 1804 Bangs travels east to the distant meeting of the New York Conference in New York. Besides, he has completed his probationary period for ordination as a deacon. Asbury approves Bangs' request to visit the far west, and not only ordains him deacon, but, two days later, elder, so that he can administer the sacraments. The details of Bangs travels, and what he felt and experienced, filled my notes of years before.

This time my attention was drawn to the folks Bangs encountered when he arrived. The Moravian missionaries and Mohawks at the River Thames who fervently hoped that Bangs would succeed among the white settlers to decrease the deprecations against their peoples. The host at the first cabin he encountered after transiting 30 miles of forest, who travelled some ten miles around his cabin to gather a congregation, then sent his son to the next appointment to let them know that Bangs was coming. The settler from New Jersey who tearfully asked if Bangs knew Asbury. The French and metis settlers of Detroit who seemed lukewarm at best to his message. Eventually the man who wrote him the Macedonian letter.

While the details are spare, these folks created the expectations, and opposition, which gave form to Bangs' ministry. Theirs was the passion that ignited under his preaching and became the foil for his account.

(cont. p. 3)

(cont. from p. 1) cannot alter the past but it can begin to create a different future. There may be numerous examples of congregations worshipping together but none can have the symbolic and historic messages that this gathering embodied. The pain and the impact of the walkout have reverberated for more than two centuries. But it has also given rise to a great church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The Distinguished Service Award has been given for twenty years to individuals who have served the ministry of memory. These persons have been leading professors, authors, historians, and servants of the church. For the first time, the General Commission decided that the Great Gathering of these two congregations was such a significant and historic event that the Distinguished Service Award should go to these two congregations. We honor the courage and vision of the two pastors and their willingness to write a different history going forward.

We recognize that Pastor Fred Day extended the invitation to Pastor Mark Tyler to preach and that Mark offered to have his entire congregation join with him in coming to St. George's. We honor the willingness of one congregation to host and the other to journey a few blocks in space but a great distance in memory. This moment of worship has also been followed up by other events including St. George's coming to Mother Bethel for the 250th Anniversary of the birth of Richard Allen.

But this event we honor tonight is but a marker on the road that looks back to discriminatory acts and forward to that day when justice will roll down like an everflowing stream. This is to be a marker to what lies ahead in the quest for racial justice and the end to discrimination in whatever form it presents itself. It is right, good, and proper that the agency charged with the historic interests of The United Methodist Church remember those events of the late 18th century and about 220 years later, honors an event that seeks reconciliation and offers an expression of commitment to break down the walls that divide the human community."



Pastor Mark Tyler & Pastor Fred Day (photo by David Fonda)

(cont. from p. 2) Without this convergence, it would be hard to see any reaction at all. And, as Keating has shown in her reflections on the population of Detroit contemporaneous with Bangs' visit, they can also be fuel for an exploration of other histories, regional records, and myriad sources to thicken the spare rendering of Stevens/Bangs with more about "what's bugging the people."

New sources are always helpful; and yet the old sources can be remarkably enlightening. This is true for itinerants' accounts, or even local or conference histories. The First United Methodist Church of Dixon, Illinois recently celebrated 175 years. An old conference history dates the founding of the church to the first visit of itinerant

James McKean, with a reflection on his tribulations as a frontier circuit rider. Yet the same history relates that, some months before McKean's visit, Mrs. Dixon, a Baptist, Mrs. Hamilton, a Presbyterian, and Mrs. Talmadge, a Methodist, appointed a day for worship because of their concern over the religious state of the settlement. On the day, they met at the bar of Mr. Dixon's store. Many of the settlers attended. When none of the men volunteered to lead, Mrs. Dixon and Mrs. Talmadge conducted worship, with the latter preaching with liberty. They continued to conduct worship until McKean came the following Spring. New insights can arise from old sources.

Happy questioning.

Just A Reminder:

1) The year following each General Conference is the year in which the Historical Society elects new officers. Look for a ballot in the Winter 2013 issue to cast your vote for HSUMC officers for the upcoming quadrennium.

2) The 2013 HSUMC Annual Meeting will take place from September 14-16 at Drew University in conjunction with the GCAH annual meeting, which will host annual conference commission chairs. Watch upcoming issues of *Historian's Digest* or further information.

HSUMC TREASURER'S REPORT/APRIL 30,2012

Balance – June 30, 2011 \$13,582.56

	Budget	Actual
Income:		
Dues	\$ 5,700.00	\$4,882.00*
From Reserves	<u>6,800.00</u>	<u>2,016.71</u>
Total Income	\$12,500.00	\$ 6,898.71

Expenses:		
<i>Methodist History</i> (quarterly)	\$5,000.00	\$3,469.37**
<i>Historian's Digest</i> (quarterly)	1,400.00	1,010.72**
Awards	1,500.00	839.75
Travel (Board of Directors)	4,000.00	1,152.85***
Insurance	500.00	336.70
Postage and Miscellaneous	<u>100.00</u>	<u>89.32</u>
Total Expenses	\$12,500.00	\$ 6,898.71

Balance – April 30, 2012 \$13,565.85

* Includes \$1,000 gift from Bea Shepperd for Albea Godbold Fund and \$100 Benefactor membership from Dan Swinson.

** Due to the earlier Annual Meeting, only three issues each of *Methodist History* and *Historian's Digest* have been included in these Expense figures.
***Members of Board of Directors accepted less than reimbursable travel expense or requested no reimbursement.

HSUMC APPROVED BUDGET FOR 2012-2013

Income:	
Dues	\$3,500.00
From Reserves	<u>8,000.00</u>
Total Income	\$11,500.00

Expenses:	
<i>Methodist History</i>	\$ 5,000.00
<i>Historian's Digest</i>	1,400.00
Travel (Board of Directors)	3,000.00
Awards	1,500.00
Insurance	500.00
Postage and Miscellaneous	<u>100.00</u>
Total Expenses	\$ 11,500.00

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