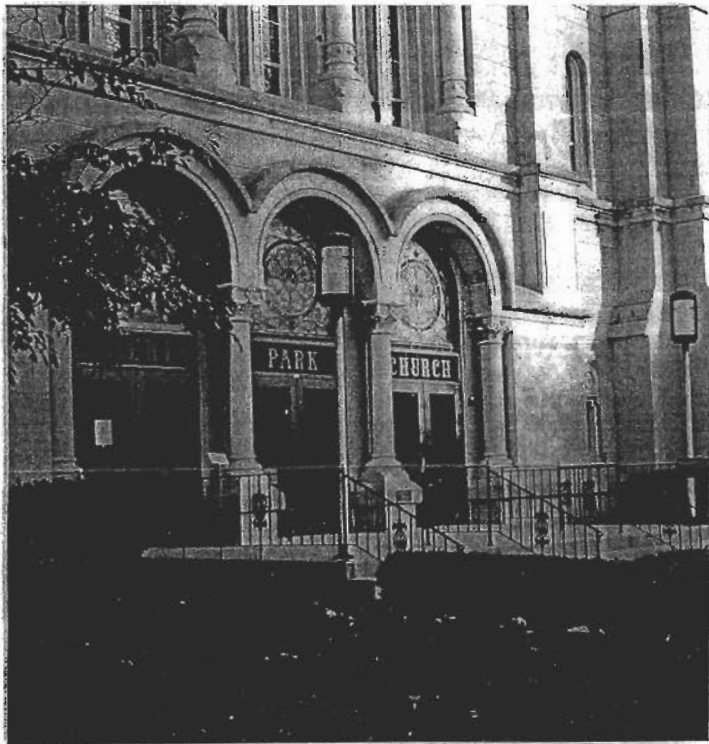


The Indiana United Methodist Historical Society
Newsletter

P. O. Box 331, Greencastle, Indiana 46135

Spring 2006

Women Especially Welcome



Roberts Park United Methodist Church, which traces its history back to seven members of a class organized by William Cravens in 1821 (the first religious congregation of any kind in the town of Indianapolis) and which hosted the General Conference in 1856, will open its doors to the annual meeting of the Indiana United Methodist Historical Society on Saturday, April 29, 2006. The meeting will be a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the granting of full clergy rights to women in the Methodist Church.

Registration for the annual meeting will be at 10:00 a.m. Indianapolis time (Eastern Daylight Time by April 29th). A very brief business meeting will be held at 10:30 a.m.

At 11:00 a.m., Rev. Howard Boles, pastor of Roberts Park UMC, a native Hoosier, and holder of an M.A. degree in church history from the University of Iowa, will present a lecture on the role of women in Methodist ministry, examining in depth the effect of official ordination on their status and their lives. Rev. Boles' other degrees are from the University of Evansville and Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. A clergywoman of the Methodist Church will augment Rev. Boles' presentation.

After a 12:30 p.m. lunch, the history of Roberts Park UMC will be presented in the sanctuary of the church – a church which is a scion of the first church on the Circle (Wesley Chapel, built in 1829) and which in subsequent moves of only a few city blocks remained at the center of its city. Hearing Roberts Park's story told in the broad expanse of the sanctuary may help those attending to sense the presence of that General Conference, held only a few blocks away 150 years ago.

The registration fee will cover both registration and lunch. Registration is \$12 for members of IUMHS, \$15 for non-members. (See the registration form on page 5, opposite the map of downtown Indianapolis on page 4.)

Parking for the Annual Meeting

A large parking lot to the east side (the back side) of Roberts Park United Methodist Church may be accessed from Vermont Street or from Alabama Street, the latter a southbound one-way street as it passes by the entrance to the parking lot.

On Saturdays, parking is permitted in the downtown area without the requirement of placing coins in the parking meters.

Some Women Who Led the Way



Susan C. Leffingwell received a license to preach in 1894 from the Methodist Protestant Church, Indiana Conference

Charity Opheral

What was termed "a note of commendation to liberate to public speaking" (essentially an exhorter's license) was granted to Charity Opheral by the first session of the White River Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ in 1847 – the first annual conference license, it is believed, granted to a woman by the UB in Christ, certainly the first granted to a United Methodist woman.

Lydia Sexton

On May 3, 1851, the Iroquois Circuit of the Illinois Conference of the UB in Christ granted Lydia Sexton the first quarterly conference license to preach ever given to a woman, but the conference withheld its annual license. Later, on April 2, 1859, the Upper Wabash Conference of Indiana issued Sexton a "letter of recommendation to preach," which, though not a license, carried the weight of one.

Maggie Thompson Elliot

The second quarterly conference license to preach issued to a woman by the UB in Christ (after Lydia Sexton) was granted at Pleasant View Church near New Albany in May of 1874.

Maggie Thompson Elliot served as an evangelist for 14 years and was granted a "letter of recommendation to preach" by the Indiana Conference in 1876. In the now historic General Conference of 1889, the Church of the UB in Christ approved the ordination of women.

Ordained by the Central Illinois Conference in 1890, Maggie Thompson Eliot was the second UB woman in the United States to receive a conference preaching license.

Helenor Alter Davison

In 1862, the General Conference of the Northern and Western conferences of the Methodist Protestant Church amended its constitution, redefining the word "suffrage" by striking out the word "male," thus giving women the right to vote in church affairs. At the 1863 meeting of the Wabash Conference, Helenor Alter Davison applied for and received a license to preach; and, at the 1865 meeting, her father, the Rev. John Alter, a member of the conference, introduced a resolution for Helenor's ordination. The motion was tabled for a year; and, at the 1866 meeting, on a motion by T. E. Lancaster, it was tabled indefinitely. Then Lancaster moved that every person serving two years as a licentiate was eligible for ordination. This motion carried. Hence, during that 1866 session, Helenor and her husband were both ordained.

However, the matter was not concluded. At the next conference session in 1867, Lancaster and A. H. Widney offered another resolution: "Resolved that the election of females to orders is incompatible with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures and not in accordance with our book of discipline." The resolution was referred to the next General Conference.

Helenor Alter Davison was the first Methodist woman in the United States to be ordained. There would not be another in Indiana until Mabelle M. Shaffer in 1926.

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Some Women Who Led the Way

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Bessie Frady

In 1918, Bessie Frady was licensed to preach by the Indiana Conference of the Church of the UB in Christ. She served only three appointments until her death in 1954, but the last of those three appointments included 29 years of continuous service to a single church. This is an Indiana United Methodist record that still stands. Frady Memorial Church in Ragelsville is named in her honor.

This article was adapted from "Pioneer United Methodist Women Clergy," Historical Bulletin Insert No. 21, prepared for the South Indiana Conference United Methodist Bicentennial Coordinating Committee and the Indiana United Methodist Bicentennial, 2000-2001, by John R. Riggs, Archives Researcher, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism.

Church Anniversaries in 2006

Those celebrating bicentennials are Brownsville in Union County and Lawrenceburg in Dearborn County.

Sesquicentennial celebrations are being held by Bonds Chapel (Orange Co.), Farmland (Randolph Co.), Fortville (Hancock Co.), Holland (Dubois Co.), Mount Carmel (Blackford Co.), Mount Olive (Morgan Co.), New Mount Pleasant (Jay Co.), Newbern (Bartholomew Co.), Oak Chapel (Grant Co.), Richland Center (Fulton Co.), Shoals (Martin Co.), Soloman Creek (Elkhart Co.), Spurgeon (Pike Co.), Tobinsport (Perry Co.), and Frady in Raglesville (Daviess Co.), named after Bessie Frady, the clergywoman in the above article.

Also, 200 years ago, in 1806, the White Water Circuit was formed as part of the Ohio District in the Western Conference. Established west of the Great Miami River, this was the first Ohio circuit to include Indiana appointments. The first Indiana class on the circuit was founded at a settlement on Elkhorn Creek.

On-line Access: Ruter Memoirs

Several years ago, the Archives of Indiana United Methodism received the two-volume hand-written memoirs of Calvin Ruter. David Tripp, a member of the North Indiana Conference who is currently serving Rolling Prairie, has transcribed and edited the memoirs, adding biographical information, a name index, supporting documents, and many notes.



Calvin Washington Ruter, 1794-1859

The author of these memoirs, Calvin Washington Ruter, was a member of the Indiana Conference, serving churches throughout southeast Indiana. His appointments included Madison, Vevay (where Ruter Chapel bears his name), and Indianapolis, where he was presiding elder. Calvin Ruter became acquainted with former Indiana governor, then U.S. senator, James Whitcomb, who invited Ruter and his family to stay in his house in Indianapolis and care for his extensive library. That private book collection eventually became and still is the core of the DePauw University library. Calvin Ruter took great pride in his service on the committee that founded Indiana Asbury (now DePauw University) in 1837.

The memoirs are now incorporated into an on-line edition that includes photographs and digital facsimiles of original manuscript pages. The e-book, *Calvin Washington Ruter's Brief Sketch of His Life and Itinerant Labours*, may be seen at www.depauw.edu/library/archives/ruter/calvinruter/home/index.htm