

SIZZLING HEAT FAILS TO DAMPEN SPIRITS OF CONVOCATION PARTICIPANTS

Around 80 people gathered in Oklahoma City from July 20-24 for the 7th quadrennial Historical Convocation and the 22nd annual meeting of the Historical Society of the UMC. Despite temperatures that exceeded 100° nearly every day participants were well taken care of in air-conditioned buildings and churches and enthusiasm for the program (and the bountiful food) was evident throughout the meeting.

The Convocation opened with a visit to the beautiful, state-of-the-art, Oklahoma History Center which houses the Oklahoma Museum of History, the administration of the Oklahoma Historical Society and its Research Division. William D. Welge, Director of Research, for the Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS) described the extensive holdings of the Society, especially its large collection of newspapers, including 90.1% of all newspapers published in the state since 1844, as well as many of its resources related to Methodism.

The GCAH Distinguished Service Award Banquet was also held in the Devon Great Hall of the Center directly under a full-sized replica of the “Winnie Mae,” the airplane in which well-known Oklahoman, Wiley Post, made the first solo flight around the world. Bill Wilson, Secretary of GCAH, presided over the banquet and made the Distinguished Service Award to Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, long-time Methodist librarian at Drew University and a leading scholar and bibliographer on Methodist history.



Ken titled his response to the Award, “40 Years in Methodist’s Attic,” as he described his journey into Methodist history at Drew University and beyond, beginning with a dual appointment at the University to the position of Methodist librarian and professor of of Methodist history and polity. It was clear as Ken talked that his need to truly engage his students in



Methodist history led him to add items to the Methodist collection which might otherwise have never been chosen, and thus the collection grew into one which he was able to use to help persuade the denomination to house its Archives Center at the University.

Our Friday morning program opened with an address by Dr. Tash Smith, “*We May Not Be the Same in Color, But We are the Same in Heart: The Indian Roots of Oklahoma’s Methodism,*” Dr. Smith led us through the history of the churches which today make up the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC). Methodism became the strongest denomination in the area due to the facts that Methodists incorporated more Native pastors into their churches than did other denominations, and they avoided expensive preaching stations, gathering in local churches and Indian boarding schools. Native pastors were less interested in church dogma than personal experience and prayer which they saw as key to how Christianity could speak to individual personal needs; further, they did not require that Natives throw off all elements of their Native culture. Though



white leaders chaffed over the control that Native pastors had over their churches, these pastors managed to prevail.

Unfortunately, we were greatly saddened during the Friday morning break to learn of the terrorist attacks in Norway which were made more personal due to the presence of the Rev. Jorunn Wendell, a member of GCAH from Norway. Our prayers went out to Jorunn and her fellow Norwegians during this terrible time.

Following the break Rob Sledge, presented the 2011 Saddlebag Award to Russell Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, for the publication of the second volume of their two- volume work, *The Methodist Experience in America Volume I* Ken Rowe accepted the award on behalf of the three authors.

Ken, with his usual humor, explained that the authors had decided from the outset to prepare the second volume – the sourcebook which serves as the documentation for the narrative – first. Then the sources would be woven into the narrative. These

two books together will likely be the basis for United Methodist history and polity classes for many years to come.



The afternoon session opened with a lecture by Dr. Paul T. Barton, “*An Alternative Concept of Evangelism: Latina Protestants’ Participation in the Evangelistic Witness.*” Dr. Barton began by noting that since evangelism has traditionally been conceived of as the spoken word – preached from the pulpit - it has been by definition primarily a male enterprise since women have only relatively recently been allowed to preach. Thus the role of women – in this case – Latina women – in the evangelistic process has been overlooked. Though there were a very few women who served as conference evangelists or carried on the work of their pastor husbands after their deaths, the primary way in which Latina women engaged in evangelism was through the way they lived out their traditional gender roles – in Sunday School rooms, in counseling among women, in service to the needy, and in opening one’s homes to neighbors, taking advantage of traditional gender roles to communicate the Gospel to members of their own families, neighbors, children and youth.

HSUMC President, Dan Swinson, then presented the 2011 Ministry of Memory Award to John Gooch from the Missouri Annual Conference. John has been involved in Missouri Archives and History for many years semi-annual journal of the Missouri United Methodist Historical Society.

We then traveled to Hillcrest-Fuente De Vida UMC where we were treated to a wonderful Mexican dinner. After opening music and a welcome from the pastor, Tino Espinoza, Bishop Joel Martinez presented an overview of the Oral History Project of





Hispanic/Latino United Methodism. This project grew out of conversations with many in the church of the need to preserve the faith stories their leaders while they were still living.



Prior to World War II, most Hispanic/Latinos' lives were confined to their local communities and barrios. All of a sudden they were involved in the War, were sent around the world and came back a different people, aware of a wider world. Some began to go to school under the GI Bill and pastors began to go to Seminary. Many of these people are no longer living or are incapacitated and no longer able to share their faith stories. Thus, this project was begun. Many stories have now been videotaped and Bishop Martinez shared with the group parts of a number of the interviews.

On Saturday morning Dr. Michelene E. Pesantubbee (Choctaw) made a moving presentation, "The Way of the Ghost Bird – Not," describing her search for evidence of "beloved women," among the Choctaw. She noted that it was sometimes like searching for a ghost; yet, there were glimpses now and then among the stories she gathered. She described how the roles of Choctaw men and women have changed due to the elimination of the "green corn ceremony," where women were respected as farmers and equal to males who were the hunters. With the loss of the green corn ceremony came the loss of the tradition of matrilineal clans; and with this loss has often come racism, violence and physical/emotional abuse. Choctaw women are often able to survive, however, through their involvement in the church where they can create a safe space for themselves and their children.



The HSUMC 2011 annual meeting was held following this presentation. The Treasurer's Report and the 2012 proposed budget were passed. These will be printed in the Winter issue of the Digest. It was reported that since our membership continues to drop, we no longer have enough income from membership to support our expenses so that we are now drawing down on our reserves. Thus, the Society voted to establish the Albea Godbold Development Fund to receive gifts, bequests, and other funds to support the work of the HSUMC. See the bottom of page six for more information about this new fund.

We voted to expand the Historical Society e-list to as many names as possible as the first step in the 5-year plan being developed by the Board. Bob Williams will manage this list. Following this expansion smaller "interest group" lists will be developed to facilitate communication on subjects of like interest – such as genealogy, museums and historic sites, local church history, etc.



On the last full day, OIMC led the way in the Native American setting. We visited the Citizen Potawatami Nation Cultural Heritage Center, the Seminole Nation Museum, and the Salt Creek United Methodist Church. At the Seminole Museum the Rev. Lewis Johnson gave a lively presentation on the history of the Seminoles.

In his President's letter for *Historian's Digest*, Dan Swinson gave the following description of our visit to the Salt Creek Church:

" At the Church, we had a magnificent meal (feast, really), and met with the Muscogee (Creek) congregation, along members of nearby Choctaw and Seminole churches. The Salt Creek sanctuary harkened to the 1840's, with a mourner's bench, small communion table and baptistery, center pulpit, preachers' chairs, and small platform railing. The congregation continues separate seatings



(women and children on the right, men on the left), and a form of hymn lining. Until a few years back, there were semi-permanent living quarters encircling the Church for members who traveled from a distance, and a cow horn summoned the folk to worship (Pastor Nelson 'Scottie' Harjo shared the elders' teaching that, when the horn sounded, you stopped and remained still to 'not disturb the air' while people were called to worship).

There is even a shape note hymnal, *Heavenly Highway Hymns*, a 'modern' adaptation with a penchant for country Gospel of the 1930's and 1940's. Yet here I found the chorus 'Blessed Be the Name' serving to carry Charles Wesley's 'O, For A Thousand Tongues to Sing.'

*O, for a thousand tongues to sing/blessed be the name of the Lord;
The glories of our God and King/blessed be the name of the Lord.*

Chorus:

*Blessed be the name, blessed be the name, blessed be the name of the Lord.
Blessed be the name, blessed be the name, blessed be the name of the Lord.*

*Jesus the name that charms our fears/blessed be the name of the Lord.
Tis music in the sinner's ears/blessed be the name of the Lord.*

Chorus

As I read this odd, choppy way of rendering Wesley, I realized I was looking at a probable survival of what Ian Straker called "the wandering chorus." In his presentation of the first printed AME hymnals of the early 1800's, made at the Charles Wesley tercentennial in 2007 in Washington, D.C., Straker presented, and Sam Young commented on, the popularity of choruses that could be added to standard hymn (in this case, the first and third lines of most common meter hymns). Talk about the past not even being past.

Over the last twenty-three years, as I have attended most of the convocations and historical society meetings, I have frequently had this experience of traditions surviving not only in honored historical memory but in living form like that of Salt Creek. They are continuing reminders of the rich and vital tradition in which we stand, and the major reason that attendance at the annual meetings remains a priority.”



The Convocation concluded with early morning worship at St. Luke's UMC in downtown Oklahoma City where Bishop Hayes reminded us that "Our Ending is God's Beginning." All in all a most worthwhile Convocation and annual meeting.

