Twenty-first Century Pilgrims and Refugees

By Dr. Jerry Cain

On November 16, President Obama flew east for an Asian summit and a planned visit to Myanmar while I hosted a group of displaced citizens from Myanmar, all Kachins, who were on a pilgrimage through Kansas City.

The Kachins are a tribal group in northern Myanmar (also called Burma) that have embraced the Christian message due to the faithful witness of American missionaries. While the overwhelming majority of Kachins are Christian, about 10 percent of them are living in displaced person camps across Myanmar.

During World War II the Kachins were loyal allies of the American forces. They rescued and sheltered over 500 U.S. fliers shot down over Burma while conducting raids on the Japanese invaders. The courtyard of the American embassy in Yangon honors the Kachins for their fierce fighting against the Japanese. I have been to the region several times, most recently in August of 2014.

Modern day Kachins are out of favor with the current government of Myanmar and, if they can get out of the country, often become refugees in the United States. Some 2800 have settled here and in 2002 they founded in Omaha, The First Kachin Baptist Church in America.

The first missionary to contact the Kachins was Eugenio Kincaid who visited northern Burma in 1837 at the behest of Adoniram Judson the venerable American missionary. At Kincaid’s insistence, Ola Hansen, settled in northern Burma, codified the Kachin language and translated the Bible. One hundred seventy-five years later this tribal group has embraced the teachings of Jesus, and though ostracized in their native land, have become our immigrant neighbors in the heartland.

In appreciation of missionary Eugenio Kincaid, 37 Kachins, displaced from their homeland in Myanmar, became pilgrims in November and made the trip from Omaha to Girard, KS, where Kincaid is buried. On the way back to Omaha, I met with these pilgrims to debrief on their journey.

They reported on Kincaid’s retirement from mission work and his decision to settle in Kansas in 1857. The Kincaid Memorial Church in Girard, KS, was founded and named for him during his lifetime. He died in 1883 and was buried in this tiny Kansas town where his legacy was lost, his grave was ignored and the church changed its name.

Continued on page 2
International Conference on Baptist Studies VII

Following six successful International Conferences on Baptist Studies around the world beginning at Oxford in 1997, there is to be a seventh at Luther King House, Manchester, England, the home of the Northern Baptist Learning Community, from Wednesday 15 to Saturday 18 July 2015.

The theme this time is “Baptists and Revival”, a topic which includes traditional revivals, modern crusades and the more general reinvigoration of Baptist life. The theme will be explored by means of case studies, some of which will be very specific in time and place while others will cover long periods and more than one country. All will be based on original research.

A number of main papers will address key aspects of the subject, but offers of short papers to last no more than 25 minutes in delivery are very much welcome as well. They should relate in some way to the theme of ‘Baptists and Revival’. The proposed title should be submitted to Professor D. W. Bebbington, School of History and Politics, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA, Scotland, United Kingdom (e-mail: d.w.bebbington@stir.ac.uk).

Luther King House is providing meals, accommodation and facilities. The capacity of the House is limited to 59 and so early booking is advisable. Additional attenders will be welcome if they make their own arrangements and pay £80 for lunch, dinner, refreshments and facilities at Luther King House. Registration forms are available from Beverley Bartram, Conference Office, Luther King House, Brighton Grove, Manchester M14 5JP, United Kingdom (e-mail: LKHConferenceOffice@lkh.co.uk; tel: +44 (0)161 249 2539).

Further information is available from Nathan Finn, Associate Professor of Historical Theology and Baptist Studies at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina (e-mail: nfinn@sebts.edu).

Pilgrims

Continued from page 1

But the Kachins revere this nineteenth century missionary and are now working to revive his story in the Midwest. I was deeply touched by these pilgrims who did their research and then searched out the last remaining evidences of this pioneer missionary who brought the story of Christ to northern Myanmar.

In similar fashion, Kachins, Chin, and Karen refugees make pilgrimages to the American Baptist Historical Society in Atlanta, where they can see some of the writings and translations of their earliest missionaries.

For another piece of this story, see “From The Archives” on page 3.

Author Jerry B. Cain is Chancellor of Judson University (Elgin, Illinois) and also serves on the Advisory Council for the American Baptist Historical Society.

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From the Archives

Engenio Kincaid’s missionary colleague, Ola Hansen, is best known for his pioneer translation work for the Kachin peoples. Like Kincaid, Hansen retired to the Midwest, in his case to his native Nebraska, where his grave has also been a pilgrimage site for recent Kachin immigrants.

Hansen wrote a Kachin grammar and dictionary for use by fellow missionaries. He also created a spelling book, brief hymnal, and many translations of scriptures.

The Historical Society holds copies of these works, Mrs. Ola Hansen’s well-worn Kachin Bible, illustrated here and including Genesis, Exodus, Luke, and John, and a collection of one hundred “Sacred Hymns.”

Bottom right is a copy of Minnie Hanson’s Bible, above it is the title page of “Sacred Hymns”. Below is one of the pages from the hymn book showing the hymn “I Love To Tell the Story”.

The Kachin Baptist Convention (in America) dedicated this new gravestone for the Hansens in 2009, Oakland, Nebraska. This photo is courtesy of the ABC of Nebraska.

The American Baptist Quarterly!

Founded in 1938 as The Chronicle, The American Baptist Quarterly (ABQ) is the oldest Baptist denominational journal in this country. The ABQ publishes proceedings from meetings, such as the recent issues on Baptists and the Holy Spirit as well as the Judson Bicentennial conference from November 2013.

Also published are scholarly articles and documents submitted independently, such as the forthcoming Jubilee issues; i.e. two issues which include articles on a variety of subjects in mission and church history and the 2014 Torbet Prize winning essay.

Because of a gap between old and new editors, there has been a lag in the publishing schedule, with the remaining issues for the year 2013 to be printed in the early months of 2015. The remainder of 2014 issues are also anticipated for later in 2015.

Subscriptions at $50 annually (plus postage for international subscriptions) are still being accepted for 2014, with renewal notices to subscribers to be sent in January 2015.

Among the special issues to be published in the coming year are ones on Adoniram Judson Gordon, Resources for Black History Month, Jamaican Sam Sharpe, and West Virginia Baptists. Authors wishing to submit articles should send the article via email to the ABQ editor, Dr. Curtis Freeman, at abqeditor@abhsarchives.org.

To subscribe to the ABQ, fill out the subscription form on page 2 or go to http://abhsarchives.org/publications/american-baptist-quarterly/.

Post this page on your bulletin board. When you use information from “From the Archives” remember to give credit to the American Baptist Historical Society.
In “From the Archives” you can read about Minnie Hanson (pictured here) and her husband, Ola, and their work among the Kachin people in Burma. Below is part of their new gravestone in Oakland, NE.

This photo is courtesy of the ABC of Nebraska

Biennial Mission Summit
June 26-28, 2015
Overland Park, KS

Don’t miss these events:

★ Breakfast Sunday, June 28
★ Younger Award Presented (for excellence in local or regional American Baptist history. See abhsarchives.org for more info.)
★ Visit the booth in the Exhibit Hall
★ Watch demonstration of book repair
★ Find how to develop your own church archives

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