Saving History: Oriented to Haiti

Could Baptists really be 400 years old? Yes, if one traces the lineage back to one or two English congregations in Amsterdam. Congregations in the U.S., however, more often trace their lineage to Roger Williams in Rhode Island or to John Leland’s preaching in Virginia and Connecticut.

But Baptists in Haiti look to the Rev. Thomas Paul, sent in 1823 to Haiti by the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society. They also honor as pioneer missionaries William C. Monroe, sent in 1835 by the Triennial Convention. Jemima Straight arrived in the country around 1878 as an independent Baptist—supported in part by the Baptist church in Nicetown, PA—who, in turn, brought Elie Marc, a Newton Theological Institution student from France.

Church history looks differently when viewed from Haiti or another part of the Caribbean, rather than from Holland or Rhode Island. High interest in this year’s earthquake recovery in Haiti, as well as plans for the 2011 American Baptist Biennial meeting in Puerto Rico, provide opportunities to gain a broader understanding of our faith heritage.

One might wonder if the catastrophic earthquake requires that we set aside historical interests. Yet as Haitian leaders have explained in a variety of media, rebuilding requires not just cement, but also a nuanced understanding of Haitian culture and history — without which there would be no energy for rebuilding the country.

Preserving and sharing a cultural heritage is a massive project. The American Baptist Historical Society assists in this effort by caring for old and new documents about Baptist work in Haiti, including materials about British Baptists, Free Baptists, and American Baptists. One excellent resource for readers wanting to learn more about Baptists in the Caribbean, including Haiti, is the Winter 2007 issue of the American Baptist Quarterly, “The Bahamas: Baptist Witness Amidst Slavery, Colonialism, and Globalization.” Guest editor Daniel L Schweissing is a former missionary to the Bahamas, now serving as a home missionary in Colorado with ministry among recent immigrants. Another excellent resource for those wanting to learn more about the history of missions in Haiti is Ivah T. Heneise’s book, Pioneers of Light: Stories of the Baptist Witness in Haiti: 1823-1998 (1999) and available from Baptist World Alliance’s Heritage and Identity Commission at www.bwa-baptist-heritage.org, then click on Resources.

Come On Along!
The first phase of the History Matters Campaign is swiftly coming to an end. If you want to be included in this great undertaking, use the form on p. 5 and send your gift or pledge by July 31.
New Internet Resources

Our Legacy as American Baptists in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean

Whether on Google Books or through the website of a university, more and more documents about Baptist history are appearing on websites, available for free or a modest fee.

A couple of newly accessible sources promise to deepen understanding of our legacy as American Baptists in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.

Persons eager to learn more should check out the library and archives of the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, http://www.se-pr.edu/portal/biblioteca.html, an ABC-related theological school. A finding guide of their historical archives Colecciones del Archivo Historico may encourage you to plan a visit as a part of your trip to the 2011 ABC Biennial in San Juan.

Another source is the Center for the Study and Research of the Christian Faith in Puerto Rico, which launched a new section to their website this April. It’s part of the academic research at the InterAmerican University of Puerto Rico, founded by a Presbyterian missionary in 1912.

The Center’s internet project makes available the papers of Dr. Ángel M. Mergal Llera (1909-1971), an American Baptist and foremost Puerto Rican scholar. Among his key publications is Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers.

Recently, the principal researchers of the Center digitalized a large collection of original documents of Rev. Abelardo M. Diaz Morales (1885-1950). He is among the first generation of Puerto Rican clergy whose theological education came from missionaries. The documents are made available to the Center by the First Baptist Church in Caguas, Puerto Rico. The Center’s principal researchers are Dr. Jesus Rodriguez Sanchez, Dr. Hector E. Lopez Sierra, Dr. Carmen Julia Pagan Cabrera and Prof. David Hernandez Lozano (professors Rodriguez, Cabrera and Lozano are also American Baptist scholars).

To see these collections for yourself, go to http://www.metro.inter.edu/facultad/esthumanisticos/centro_estudio_fe_cristiana.htm.
A Great Loss: Clydia Nahwooksy

The death of Clydia Trolinder Glory Nahwooksy (1933-2009) last December 31 was a great loss for her family, for American Baptist Churches and for Indian Country. Clydia (Cherokee) and her husband, Reaves Nahwooks (Comanche and Kiowa), served as advocates and activists for Indian rights throughout their lives, including Clydia’s work during the 1970s with the Smithsonian’s Festival of American Folklife.

Clydia’s work included bringing Native American groups to the National Mall for concerts and demonstrations experienced by thousands of summer visitors to Washington, DC. She also pressed successfully for the Smithsonian to open up its Indian collections for study and use by tribal leaders and historians, which became the precursor to the National Museum of the American Indian.

In 1986 Reaves retired from his government position and the couple moved to Rochester, NY, for seminary training, after which they returned to Oklahoma for ordination at the Rainy Mountain Kiowa Indian Baptist Church. While Reaves founded and pastored Indian congregations in Nebraska, Clydia assisted in church work, served on the ABC General Board, and directed the outreach of the Plains Indian Cultural Center at the Indian Center in Lincoln, NE.

Both volunteered on denominational boards and commissions and with numerous organizations for the preservation and sharing of Native American languages, culture and history. When possible, Clydia Nahwooksy brought her worlds together, as when she called the Historical Society and friends at the Smithsonian for help in planning an inventory of the church archives at Rainy Mountain. She understood the church records were valuable for understanding the heritage of the congregation and the American Baptist Home Mission Societies, since missionaries served there in the 1890s.

With the Nahwooksy legacy so rich and varied, the American Baptist Historical Society is concerned to collect and preserve documents and stories about the lives of Clydia and Reaves and their family.

ABHS welcomes emails, letters, or materials about Clydia or Reaves. Clydia and her beloved husband were both leaders whose contributions to ABC life and the broader world made history in Indian Centers, congregations, and cultural meetings in Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Idaho. Their legacy is found not just in churches, but in the Smithsonian’s Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC.

ABHS on the Road to the BWA Congress

ABHS will have a booth at the 20th Baptist World Congress this summer in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Sponsored every five years by the Baptist World Alliance, the Congress welcomes Baptists from every corner of the earth for fellowship, study, worship, and service. With the theme, “Hear the Spirit” an anticipated 10,000 participants will enjoy the unique experience of celebrating in God’s world-wide family.

ABHS cares for the BWA’s archives and our booth will tell the stories of how Baptists have heard God’s call over the centuries. If you’re attending the Congress, contact Betsy at bdunbar@abhsarchives.org if you’d like to volunteer.

For more information about the Congress or the Baptist World Alliance, go to www.bwacongress2010.org or www.bwanet.org.
Rev. Victor Mercado’s (1927-2009) book, *Angeles en nuestro peregrinaje* was presented posthumously on May 14, 2010, at the Primera Iglesia Bautista de Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico. The Ministerial Council and the Iglesias Bautistas de Puerto Rico honored the memory of this outstanding pastor and prophet who knew how to live and minister in keeping with the times. He charted visionary paths that deserve to be taken up again today to advance the testimony of the Gospel of the Lord — in the midst of a world destroyed by fragmentation that pulverizes unity, the self-destruction that loses the horizon of common social interest and the dehumanization that destroys human life and nature that accompanies it.

The importance of this book is that it situates his life as a pilgrimage. Following the direction of the author of Hebrews, he highlights moments where different persons — whom he calls “angels” — shape their existential values, supported by their faith in Jesus Christ and their commitment to social transformation according to the foundations of the Kingdom of God. The pilgrimage is an open road, filled with risks and disappointments, but at the same time blended with full and beautiful possibilities within God’s purpose for life and human history. Looking at the author of faith, Jesus Christ, Mercado moves toward the celestial city. However, this advance is not accomplished at the margin, but seeks to transform itself through decisive experiences that bring it to a commitment to change the reality in light of God’s vision for the world.

Without a doubt, this book allows us to learn more about the most significant moments of the spiritual formation of a minister who has left a very valuable legacy for Baptist work in Puerto Rico, Latin America, the Caribbean and the United States. In Puerto Rico, he fought with a prophetic voice against the denominational power structures that did not allow the full participation of pastoral ministry. With his word and his life filled with transparency, he was a mentor and paved the way for a new ministerial generation committed to justice and social ministry and the recognition of women in pastoral ministry.

Furthermore, Rev. Mercado worked as Area Director for Latin America and the Caribbean for International Ministries of the American Baptist Churches for 17 years. It was his turn to carry out his executive denominational leadership precisely at a time when the American Baptist Home Mission Society decided to transfer to International Ministries the work they had begun and developed for many years in Cuba, Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Haiti. This brought him to reaffirm the achievements made in the past by the Home Mission Society and at the same time to maintain a critical distance from those perspectives and decisions that had not worked well in the mutual relationships between partners in mission.

There is no doubt that deep down in his conscience there was a sharp thorn: the sale of the land from the Academia Bautista de Barranquitas

*Continued on p. 6*

To purchase a copy of Dr. Mercado’s book, *Angeles en nuestro peregrinaje* write to

Irma Rodríguez  
P.O. Box 61093  
King of Prussia, PA 19406

Make check for $10.00 (includes shipping) payable to: Iris Mercado
Haiti, at the time Jemima Straight began her obscure work as a Christian missionary teacher at St. Suzanne, was a picture of abandoned civilization, an illustration of the terrible sin of neglect. Once the richest colony in the world, adorned with as beautiful and productive plantations as were ever developed in the tropics, it had gone back into a wilderness state far worse than primitive under a system of military despotism. A student of Haitian history becomes bewildered in an effort to find a thread of continuity in the story of the country’s downfall. From every side crowded the forces that led to Haiti’s ravishment….

Although considerably advanced in years Jemima Straight—it was about the year 1880—went to one of the most remote villages of the interior to set up her mission school. Information now in hand concerning her early venture for Christ in this land of forgotten people is exceedingly fragmentary.

Elie Marc, the Baptist missionary at Trou, Haiti, told the writer that Mrs. Collins of the Nicetown Baptist Church of Philadelphia furnished Miss Straight with her chief means of support. If any reader of this sketch has further information concerning this missionary in the form of letters, records, etc., The American Baptist Home Mission Society would be grateful for such information. (Will present and former members of the Nicetown Baptist Church please consider this a personal request?)

Jemima Straight of St. Suzanne, realizing that not many years of missionary service remained ahead of her, wrote an appeal that was published in a paper for evangelicals in France, a copy of which reached a student in the Newton Theological Institution. This student was Elie Marc, a native of Rheims, France, who spent his summer vacations working as a missionary among the French in New England….

After a week at Trou the two missionaries started up the steep bridle trail for St. Suzanne, Miss Straight now riding her own horse. Through a dense jungle divided into “farms” by cactus hedges, the two rode: then they began to mount the winding mountain trail that seemed interminable to Elie Marc. For him the serenity and courage of the frail little woman as she rode up the difficult slopes and along narrow ledges was a source of continued wonder. Her happiness was evident; she was getting “back home” once more. St. Suzanne welcomed its aged teacher. Again the children came swarming into her home, filling it to overflowing. The school was reopened….

Doubtless she considered her work as a missionary finished. She had brought Elie Marc to Haiti.


See p. 7 for the rest of the story…
Angels
Continued from p. 4

to the Universidad Interamericana by ABHMS.
This sad story could not be repeated again in his ministry with International Ministries. Having made this very clear, he put all his efforts into his ministry. He maintained that we do cross-cultural ministry not to be owners of the properties of the people we serve, but so that the national institutions can be owners of their properties and make decisions about them. In doing missionary work we do not want to control the people we serve. We only wish to accompany, respect and learn from them. This great servant of God inspires us to follow in his footsteps.

The Rev. Dr. José Norat Rodríguez serves as the Area Director for Iberoamerica and the Caribbean with International Ministries

La Historia de Su Iglesia

The vast collections cared for by ABHS have been given by Baptist friends and congregations who wanted their stories to be remembered.

In the wealth of our holdings of churches and associations that were organized by specific language groups—Swedish, Danish, German, Italian, Chinese—there is a noticeable lack of materials from Spanish-speaking congregations and associations in the U.S.

Help us spread the word that stories and materials about Baptist life with a Latin-American flavor are needed to bring this part of our Baptist legacy to light.

To help your congregation, send $15 to ABHS for a copy of our guide to preserving congregational archives, ¡Usted Puede Narrar y Preservar La Historia de Su Iglesia!

In Memory
Continued from p. 2

Rev. Carlos & Guadalupe Gurrola
Mr. Joseph Gurrola, Alhambra, CA

Keith Ignatius
Rev. & Mrs. John L. (Parm) Carroll,
Newtown Square, PA

Rev. John Ingram
Mr. Robert A. Ingram, Bethesda, MD

Rev. Paul Losh
Drs. Deborah & Harold Van Broekhoven,
Tucker, GA

Dr. Donald L. Loudermilk
Mrs. Donald Loudermilk, Charleston, WV

Elder William McCullar
Ms. Claire Prechtel-Kluskens, Alexandria, VA

Rev. Dr. Ella P. Mitchell
Dr. Henry Mitchell, Atlanta, GA

Jared H. Randall
Ms. Marilyn B. Grossi, Dublin, OH

Donald P. Rumery
Lt. & Mrs. Paul N. Rumery, Jacksonville, FL

Margaret Sedan
Mrs. Jewellene Richardson, Fresno, CA

Loyd Starrett
Mr. & Mrs. Allen (Gail) Hinand, Key West, FL

Mrs. Mary Swindle
Drs. Deborah & Harold Van Broekhoven,
Tucker, GA

Edwin H. Tuller
Dr. & Mrs. Joshua A. Jensen II, St. Louis, MO

Elmina Richard Weihe
Mr. & Mrs. Robert P. Richard, Jr., Phoenix, AZ

Woodbury Family
Mr. & Mrs. John W. Woodbury, Stoneham, ME

In Honor Of

Dr. Albert P Brinson
Revs. Roy & Patricia Medley, Freehold, NJ

Andy & Beverly Davison
Mr. Donald Holmen, Waunakee, WI

Sarah Dopp
Ms. Nancy S. Tracy, South Burlington, VT

First Baptist Church, Oakland CA,
156 years of ministry
Rev. Nancy Smith, Oakland, CA

Virginia Holmstrom
Dr. Loris Coletta, Aptos, CA

Mrs. Irene Jennings
Mrs. Beverly Carlson, Fayetteville, PA

Lakeshore Ave Baptist Church, Oakland CA
150th Anniversary
Rev. H. James Hopkins, Oakland, CA

Dr. Richard Pierard
Dr. & Mrs. Marvin A. Henry, Terre Haute, IN

Dr. Richard & Charlene Pierard
Dr. & Mrs. Richard (Carol) Visser, Brunswick, ME
The Rest of the Story...

is found in a letter to the editor, Missions, May 1925, p. 301:

In Missions for March, 1925, appeared a request for information concerning Miss Jemima Straight, who died at her station in St. Suzanne, Haiti, where she was serving as an independent missionary. An interesting letter has been received in reply from Mrs. William H. Middlebrook of Yonkers, who says: “You will please find enclosed a photograph of Miss Jemima Straight. She was my guest for several days when on her last visit to the States. It was at this time that she persuaded the Rev. Elie Marc to return with her to Haiti. The ladies of the Warburton Avenue Baptist Church, Yonkers, gave her substantial aid. I corresponded with her for some time and also with Mr. Marc. Letters finally ceased and I feared that both of these missionaries had died. Miss Straight had a large vision for Haiti, but her hearers evidently thought her plans too stupendous to make them willing to give her very great aid. But now she knows and can see the wonderful success of her labors of love.”

Photo scanned from clipping of same article in Baptist Missionary Training School Scrapbook, Haiti General and Jamaica.

Share Baptist history by posting these pages on your bulletin board. When you use information from “From the Archives” remember to give credit to the American Baptist Historical Society.

Gift Form or go to www.abhsarchives.org

THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE AMERICAN BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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You Can Support the Annual Fund, Too

Have you already made your pledge to the History Matters campaign? Thanks! A full report of the first phase will be in the next newsletter.

The Annual Fund provides for all the behind-the-scenes work necessary to preserve and share the collections in our care. It’s also a key statistic when we apply for grants; foundations like it when there’s a broad base of financial supporters. Every gift matters!
INSIDE

Saving Haiti’s History

Annual ABHS Board of Managers Public Event

World Premiere

Good News

The story of Mather School is told in this beautifully restored film from 1949.

Friday September 24, 7 pm
American Baptist Historical Society, Atlanta, GA

Mather School was founded in 1867 in Beaufort, SC, by Rachel Crane Mather of Boston with a mission to provide black women & girls a quality education. Students boarded at the school, which trained several generations of black women leaders. In 1882, the Women’s Home Mission Society assumed support for the school which continued, with some changes, until it closed in 1968.

Good News follows the school life and trials of Willie Mae Jackson, who comes to Mather from work in the cotton fields and hopes to gain the education necessary for a better job and position in life.

Because of its historic importance, ABHS was awarded a grant to preserve the film by the National Film Preservation Society, San Francisco, CA.