Myanmar on Mission

Twenty-three individuals made the pilgrimage. Each came home transformed. “I’ve never been on such an amazing trip,” enthused one experienced traveler. From college students to retirees, these individuals found much to enrich and amaze: pagodas as numerous as Baptist churches in the South; Baptist churches named “Judson” in Rangoon, Mandalay, and Moulemein; Christians and Buddhists eager to welcome American visitors.

The journey was really three trips in one: a Judson pilgrimage, an introduction to Burmese culture, and a diplomatic mission to archivists and librarians. Our offering to archivists and librarians was a digital copy of the Morning Star, a Karen language paper founded by Baptist missionaries in the 1840s and continuing under Karen leadership until World War II. The Historical Society holds the largest run of this rare and valuable paper. Recipients of our gift were eager to begin a collaboration that might result in more shared resources.

Following in the steps of Ann and Adoniram Judson took the pilgrims first to Yangon (Rangoon) and the site of the Felix Carey home where the Judsons lived upon arrival. Also in Yangon was the site of the first baptism as well as buildings of three Judson churches; downtown Emanuel Baptist, U Naw (named after the first convert), and Judson Memorial Church on the campus of the University of Yangon, formerly Judson College.

Yangon was also where we visited Shwedagon Temple to learn more about the beliefs of Buddhists in Burma. Yangon also provided an opportunity for five meetings with librarians and archivists, including four librarians at the University of Yangon, the head librarian for Continued on page 6
the country, and librarians and archivists at Myanmar Institute of Theology and the Karen Baptist Seminary at Insein.

At Bagan and Mandalay, the group also visited Buddhist temples and Baptist churches, including another Judson memorial church, as well as a church founded to commemorate Judson’s prison time at Aungbinle. Traveling in pony carts to another prison site, the pilgrims trekked through a field of banana trees to the remnant of a memorial stone. Burmese Baptists had placed the marker, later destroyed, in the shadow of two ancient trees marking the place where Judson was first imprisoned.

The group also traveled south of Yangon, visiting two more Judson memorial churches in Moulmein (Mawamyine) as well as Susan Haswell’s leprosy hospital and adjacent church, and the building which had housed the Baptist Mission Press. The group also glimpsed another Baptist institution, the original Ellen Mitchell Hospital building, now overshadowed by more modern buildings that make up the hospital.

From Moulmein the group traveled further south to Amherst Kyaikkami, where Ann Judson is buried and another Judson memorial church is carrying on the Baptist mission.

For this southern leg of the trip, the Zwengabin Hotel outside of Pa’an, capital of Karen State, was the group’s headquarters. That location in Karen territory was an unexpected gift to the group, because this was also the time and location of peace talks among Karen groups from inside and outside the country. There the museum director, to whom we had taken a digital copy of the Karen Morning Star, invited us to the evening’s entertainment—a program of singing and dancing that took place in our hotel.

So it turned out that our last evening outside of Judson’s Moulmein, Baptist pilgrims joined a peace celebration and conversation (and even a little dancing) with Karen leaders, including pastors from refugee camps on the Thai border.
Shining the Light on Karen History: The *Morning Star* Project

Early in the development of the Society’s Judson200 projects, ABHS staff recognized the rare *Morning Star* as an invaluable resource for Karen Christians and scholars throughout the world. Published by the American Baptist Mission Press between 1842 and 1942, the periodical became a channel for Karen voices and played a key role in developing a common sense of identity among the Karen people in Lower Burma. Few issues, however, have survived Burma’s climate, wars, and official ethnic discrimination. The Society’s collection is now believed to be the most complete run in existence.

In 2012 ABHS initiated the *Morning Star* project to provide widespread access to this rare publication, especially to Karen Baptists in the United States and Myanmar. Project funds covered the costs of preservation microfilming, digitization for online access, and travel expenses to Myanmar for the project team: Jan Ballard, archivist and project manager; Deborah Van Broekhoven, ABHS executive director; and Dr. Will Womack, Burmese and Karen scholar.

Institutionally, completion of the *Morning Star* project represented two major strategic milestones: 1) the Society’s first digitization project with online access to the full text of an entire collection; and 2) the Society’s first collaborative digitization project with Mercer University Libraries. The *Morning Star* issues, along with Dr. Womack’s introduction, may be found at: [http://libraries.mercer.edu/repository/handle/10898/669](http://libraries.mercer.edu/repository/handle/10898/669).

Our ultimate goal, however, was to use gifts of *The Star* as opportunities to begin forming meaningful, long-term relationships with the Baptist, academic, and cultural institutions in Myanmar for the mutual benefit of our archives and libraries – and, especially, to further the Society’s ministry of memory. Since restrictions on internet use have not been lifted in Myanmar, it was necessary to create DVD copies of the *Morning Star* to take on the Judson200 Legacy Tour.

Offerings of these DVD gifts opened up several exciting opportunities for the project team to meet with our professional library and archives counterparts in Myanmar. We visited with librarian Thra Taylor and archivist Gilda Twe at the Myanmar Institute of Theology, Insein; Alan Po, a librarian at the Karen Baptist Theological Seminary; Prof. Tun Aung Chain, a Sgaw Karen Baptist elder, university professor, and member of the National Human Rights Commission; U Thaw Kaung, who founded the library at Yangon University and organized the library education program there; Saw Kennedy Tapa and other librarians at the University of Yangon; Ms. Mya Oo, the National Librarian of Myanmar; Sau Aung Thein, director of the Karen State Culture Museum and Library; and Rev. Newton, through whom the *Morning Star* will be delivered to the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist institutions on the Thai border and in the refugee camps located there.

At every visit we discussed potential collaborative projects and exchanged contact information. The *Morning Star* project team looks forward to working with our new colleagues soon to provide greater access to the Society’s extensive Burma-related collections.
From the Archives

Burma Then and Now

Ann Judson's Grave
Above: About 1929
Right: 2013

Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital, Moulmein. Dr. Ellen Mitchell was the first mission physician to Burma.
Right: 1879
Below: 2013

Aungbinle Baptist Church:
Above : 1957
Right: 2013

Post this page on your bulletin board. And when you use information from “From the Archives” remember to give credit to the American Baptist Historical Society.
Both pictures are of the Library at the Divinity School Insein.

Above: Aungpinle Village, site of Judson’s imprisonment, 1975
Right: Tour group at the site of the prison in Aungpinle, 2013

Right: Ma Saw Sa, first Burmese woman to enter college in Burma. 1905
Far Right: A young woman has her graduation photograph taken at the compound of Aung San Sui Kyi.
Liele Book Launch

On March 22nd the Historical Society welcomed authors and interested readers to the launching of a new book, to a new Liele portrait, and a celebration of *George Liele’s Life and Legacy; An Unsung Hero*. Not as well known as William Carey, Adoniram Judson, or Lott Cary, Liele’s ministry stretched from Georgia and South Carolina to England and Jamaica, the colony to which he moved after the American Revolution.

In Jamaica, Liele’s influence was great, despite the challenges of preaching in a slavery society where Baptists were often suspected of rebellion against authorities. Liele mentored many, including missionaries to Sierra Leone and Nova Scotia. With its global scope, the book required more than a dozen authors, editors, and project researchers, shedding light on Liele’s pioneer work and leadership in a slave society.

Dr. David T. Shannon, the key individual in organizing and inspiring these efforts, died before the project was completed. But it was his intensity, winsomeness, wisdom and commitment that brought together more than a dozen workers on this project. Including pilgrimages to sites associated with Liele as well as numerous editorial meetings, the project and its members produced a definitive study of Liele in his historical context.

Mrs. Averett P. Shannon, Dr. Shannon’s widow, contributed her own editorial and artistic skills, with her new portrait of Liele providing the cover art for the book. At the book launch she presented the painting on long-term loan to the Historical Society, where it now welcomes all visitors to the reading room.

Of the significance of the book, executive director Deborah Van Broekhoven noted, “Liele’s story and struggle for freedom preceded by two generations the period after the Civil War, the time when we think U.S. citizens first struggled with the meaning of emancipation.” She added, “In that context, George Liele’s life is a prequel to the better known story of U.S. civil war and the struggle for freedom for African American citizens.”

*George Liele’s Life and Legacy: An Unsung Hero* can be purchased from Mercer University Press (www.mupress.org)

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*George Liele’s Life and Legacy: An Unsung Hero*

$35

Edited by: David T. Shannon, Sr., Julia Frazier White, Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven

ISBN: 9780881463897
Wish List

Equipment that will make it easier for researchers to work with the collection and for staff to work with researchers and process new collections:

PastPerfect Cataloguing Software Upgrade $515

Laptop computers: Three needed, loaded with Windows 7 professional software. $1000 each

Café Chair: For researchers checking databases on the reading room computer. $150

Reading Room Lamps: Four needed. $100 each

Reading Room Chairs: For conference table (8 chairs). $2400

Shelving: Units needed for processing. $500 - $3000

The following items will allow ABHS to expand our educational program:

Exhibit Cases: From vitrines and stands to fine secure exhibit cabinetry for use in the atrium outside the ABHS office. $100 - $50,000

Baptist Heroes Coloring Book: Update and republish this popular ABHS publication. $5000

Photograph Display System: Permanent wall track system for displaying enlarged collections photographs in the reading room. Cost includes first exhibit. $3000

Museum gallery protective posts and belts. $100

Yes! I/We believe in a Ministry of Memory and enclose a gift of $_______ to support the American Baptist Historical Society

☐ ABHS general fund

☐ Subscribing Membership (American Baptist Quarterly subscription)  
  $50___ 1 yr;  $90_____ 2 yrs; $130 ____ 3 yrs
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Make checks payable to ABHS; and mail with this form to ABHS, P.O. Box 851, Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851 Questions? Call Kay Eland at 610/768-2269.

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Or give on-line: Click on ‘Donate Now’ at www.abhsarchives.org.
Biennial Breakfast
“Freedom & Mission”
Sunday, June 23,  7:45 a.m.
Overland KS, Convention Center

Commemorating the bicentennial of the Judsons’ arrival in Burma and the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, Dr. Deborah Van Broekhoven will compare foreign missions in Burma and home missions among the newly freed people. Tickets are $17 and may be reserved by calling ABHS at 678-547-6680 or by registering at the Mission Summit/Biennial website www.americanbaptists2013.com.

The Younger Award winner will be announced at the breakfast.

Visit the ABHS Exhibit at Biennial

You will see more images of Burma and videos taken on the Judson Heritage tour. ABHS staff and volunteers will be available to answer questions, and resources will be available for sale.