

## A TRIBUTE TO HOME MISSIONARIES

- presented at Conference 1995

- *Marcia and Fred BAKER*

Question 17 in the Conference agenda reads: "What Deacons, Home Missionaries, and Presbyters continue in retirement?" In the past in answer to this question the names have been listed in these three categories. With the death of Harry Wright, who was one of those we remembered yesterday. Home Missionaries as we knew them will cease to exist. Who were these Home Missionaries? Quoting from past Law Books, "A Home Missionary is a Local Preacher who is employed as a full time agent of the Methodist Church of New Zealand and is in receipt of remuneration for his services."

The file of Home Missionaries and Supplies contains 600 names, 599 men and one woman. May Rushton (Robertson now Curel). Missing from this list is the name of Sister Emma Moody Bell who was appointed to Kumara in 1908. She was probably the first woman appointed to such ministry in the Church in New Zealand. Records of the Primitive Methodist Church are incomplete but they refer to Circuit Missionaries, Hired Local Preachers, Home Missionaries and GMA's<sup>1</sup> and the titles seem to be interchangeable as one man is referred to in three different ways. At least another nine names could be added to the list from the Primitive Methodist Church. The names of Presbyters and Deaconesses who acted as supplies are not included on this file.

The first mention of Home Missionaries is in the Minutes of the second New Zealand Wesleyan Conference in 1875. The list reads: "Home Mission Agents" (Auckland) John S. Hudson, Thomas J Jagger; (Taranaki Wanganui) Edward Nielson, who resides in Palmerston, Manawatu, and is employed in the Scandinavian Mission; (Otago) John Gray." It was not until the 1905 edition that any regulations appear in the Law Book. At various times men were recruited from Australia and England.

Half of those listed served less than ten years, many in just one appointment. A third were ordained as Presbyters, in the old way of saying it, entered the full ministry. This says something of how the Church tended to look on Home Missionaries. Seventy-eight served for ten or more years, Christopher Aker holding the record of 43 years service. We might ask the question: "If he and others who served for a considerable number of years, had the ability to offer what was obviously an acceptable ministry, why weren't they ordained?"

Facts and figures however do not really tell the story. It is the people themselves who make the story live. We cannot mention all 610 but we offer the following as representatives of a devoted and dedicated group who gave sterling service to the

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<sup>1</sup> Category labelled thus; meaning uncertain, possibly Missionary Assistant or Agent.

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Church over a period of nearly 100 years. They served in places like Mamaku, North Hokianga, Kumara, Granity, Denniston (have you ever been there in the fog?), Kaihu, North Taranaki Saddle Bag Mission, and in city circuits like Auckland Central, Christchurch East, Auckland Central Mission.

In 1906 we read of some Home Missionaries travelling 300 miles a month to conduct three or four services each Sunday but to have 100 people at an evening service made it all worthwhile. July and August were the worst months with roads two feet wide and six feet deep. Sometimes the preacher may have to assist in the cowshed to be assured of an organist. At one preaching place the people had been taught five Sankey hymns so there was never any difficulty in choosing what to sing.

One man, when the railway line to New Plymouth was being completed, received permission to walk through a tunnel. When an unscheduled train came along he lay down beside the track, covering himself with an oilskin as protection from the steam. In another part of the country when a Home Missionary opened his umbrella for shelter from rain and hail he was thrown clear but unfortunately for the short sighted man, lost his glasses in the fall. Rescuers found him - and his glasses - in the mud, and he was able to proceed on to conduct the funeral.



**Getting the Minister to Church; crossing the Taheke River, Hokianga in 1902.**

*- Auckland Weekly News*

The appointment of Sister Emma Moody Bell from England to Kumara was described as a novelty and experiment. She stated that she hoped to do a deal of visiting but would like the ladies to understand that she would not always take afternoon tea - she did not visit them for that. Later she was stationed at Runanga and was described as a faithful and diligent pastoress. We also remember deaconesses. Sister Edith Beer, later

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Boal, to whom we have also paid tribute at this Conference, in her pioneering work at Upper Hutt, always true to her beliefs despite unjust criticism and followed years later by Janet Evans. We think too of Sister Rita Snowden on her motor bike John Wesley at Raetihi, later working as colporteur with a caravan of books. There were others too who did similar work.

Charles Harris died in the flu epidemic in 1918, literally giving his life for the people of Ohura. His wife had been ill for a long time, their only child died of diphtheria and 18 months later he died. His wife was able to keep the work going until a supply arrived. Sixty-five years later a stone was erected on his grave. Some still remembered him as a good neighbour and a wonderful man.

Jim Woodhouse saw to the erection of that stone and he himself served faithfully in the Ohura township as an official Home Missionary for a handful of years and then as an honorary worker, tireless in his efforts, for the rest of his life.

You all know of WE Sleep's appointment to Nightcaps which even featured in Punch. He served there twice, 1908 -1913 and 1919 -1922. However at the time of the Tangiwai disaster he was living in retirement in the Raetihi-Ohakune Home Mission Station and the caring, comforting ministry he provided to survivors, some of whom had lost loved ones, was warmly commended by all who witnessed it. This surely says a great deal more about the man.

George Bridgeman is remembered for his work at Silverdale in the Whangaparaoa area. Each month he visited 100 gumdiggers, distributing all told about two ton of religious literature. When he met with an accident he was unconscious for ten days and unable to preach for three months. Gumdigger friends would walk to visit him and give his wife a coin saying, "Do buy something to make him better so he can come and see us again."

Colin Scrimgeour served for ten years, six at the Auckland Central Mission. When the Queen Street riots erupted during the depression of the 1930's and the rioters pulled the pickets off the Mission fence to use as weapons, he said it was the best use Methodist property had ever been put to. In 1932 he purchased 1ZB for £200 and along with Uncle Tom and Aunt Daisy began the Friendly Road.

"Don't hold from your fellows that helping hand,  
Merely because of a different brand;  
Give of your friendship and service for him,  
Travel the Friendly Road with Scrim."

It may sound quaint, simplistic or whatever to us today but such was his influence in the city of Auckland that before the 1935 election his radio session was jammed by the Government. This action probably won more votes for the Labour Party than his broadcast would have. When he became Director of Commercial Radio his Sunday

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evening "Man in the Street" session was top billing. Listening to "Uncle Scrim" was the only Church many people had contact with.

Ed Carter also served for ten years. He hoped to train for ordination but the doctor would not give him the required medical certificate. Instead he became a teacher and eventually visiting teacher in the Wainoni-Aranui area of Christchurch. Here he found a field of service which was ministry in its fullest sense. In her book *A Changing Order* Sister Pauline O'Regan says, "Ed Carter just had to be the best visiting teacher in New Zealand." She ended her reference to him saying, "We shared the grief of the people of Aranui when he died suddenly the following year." Ed was a gracious listener with an inner peace and serenity, and a great sense of humour. Truly a faithful minister of Christ and the Gospel.

Following his services as a Home Missionary, Herbert Bateup was in charge of the Masterton Children's Home for ten and a half years changing one form of service for another.

The remaining survivor of those who served as Home Missionaries for more than ten years is Fred Peterson, who was eventually ordained and is now a supernumerary living in Christchurch.

One interesting name which appears in the list is Earwaker. Surely a fitting name for a preacher. Another is J C Muldoon, the grandfather of Sir Rob.

Sometimes a house was not provided and this was not easy when a boat and a horse were needed too. Balance sheets would include: repairing boat 17/5, 1 pair paddles 10/-, horse feed 11/6, candles 2/9, and a deficiency with a note: Stipend still owing.

If the life of a Home Missionary was difficult and lonely, wives and families shared this with them and often their lot was even more difficult. In those days the houses provided had often not been adequately maintained. One Home Missionary's wife wondered why the paper on the ceiling of the guest room was sagging. Just before the President of Conference arrived to stay she found out. Unbeknown to her the roof had been leaking for some time and the paper could take no more and the room was deluged. As we pay tribute to the Home Missionaries, we also pay tribute to their wives who shared fully in their husbands' workload. They too gave sacrificial service. There were a number of wives who, when their husbands died, maintained the work until a replacement arrived.

One minister speaking of his Home Mission days told of travelling along on his motor bike and coming to a road that led off into rugged country. He decided to find out where it led and after several miles he came to the end and found a farmhouse. He was greeted by the lady of the house who said, "We have lived here twelve years and you are our first visitor." Not even stock agents had come down the road in that time. Backblocks New Zealand demanded a lot of all the people who lived there.

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As these men worked in what we now call the Tauwi section of our Church, working alongside them in Taha Maori were the Maori Home Missionaries. Many of these men were honorary and they served God and their people with the same devotion and dedication. We personally remember Hum Wiperi, who for a time was a frequent visitor to our home. He was a gracious Christian gentleman who always left us feeling we had received more than we had given. We honour these men as we honour their Pakeha co-workers.

The title Home Missionary now passes from our Conference minutes. As the structures have changed we now use terms like Lay Supply and Minita a Iwi.

So we pay tribute to those who have served the Church as Home Missionaries. Many here have been influenced by the gracious ministry of these people. Who now amongst us will research and record this chapter of the history of Te Haahi Weteriana?

We close with some words written many years ago: "Some of life's sweetest ministries walk forth from the quiet places of earth and such ministries are often exercised by those who cause no ripple on the sea of life but have learned that it is not great gifts but useful service that counts with God. Methodism owes much to the average men and women who have kept a great soul in a little place".