

Martin Rist and the Rocky Mountain Conference Methodist Historical Society

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THERE was a Methodist Historical Society in Colorado before Dr. Martin Rist belonged to it, but there was much less Methodist history in Colorado until Dr. Rist began to serve on that Society. How does one pay tribute to more than twenty years of service? Obviously, the service itself is a far greater tribute to the man who rendered it than any tribute which will ever be written to him.

When the Board of Directors of the Colorado Conference Methodist Historical Society met on December 10, 1937, their minutes record that "Dr. Rist of the Iliff School" attended as a guest. These minutes go on to say that at that same meeting there was presented to the Society, "An interesting souvenir of Father J. L. Dyer consisting of the 'dowser' used by him in prospecting days for locating gold veins and deposits. This was later handed to Dr. Rist to be placed in the archives of the Society for safe keeping." Whether Father Dyer ever found any gold with this dowser is not recorded, but it is certain that the Historical Society found gold in the personality of Dr. Martin Rist, for people have been handing important historical documents to him ever since, and the study of this portion of Methodist History has taken on a new dimension of thoroughness and scholarship. It was not until 1939, that Dr. Rist was officially named Custodian of the Archives of the society, but immediately thereafter he set about the business of safeguarding and enlarging those Archives. In 1940 a fire-proof repository was found for them in the Iliff School of Theology, and for the

first time, this material began to be placed in files and catalogued. At this time F. R. Hollenback entrusted to Dr. Rist the only complete set of Colorado Conference Minutes then known to exist.

Slowly the materials began to come in. A letter was sent to all of the churches asking them to report what materials they had concerning their own history, and urging them to put these materials in the Archives for safe keeping. Microfilms were made of materials not otherwise available. In 1944 documents concerning the history of the Methodist Church at Rye, Colorado, were received and filed. In 1945, Dr. Rist himself outlined the history of the University Park Church, and in that same year new material concerning the organization of Methodist Sunday Schools in Colorado in 1863 was discovered. It is probable that most of these materials would be permanently lost by this time had it not been for the work of a conscientious Archivist several years ago.

About 1945, it began to occur to the Historical Society that a marker ought to be placed at sites of special historical significance to the Methodist Church. The first such marker was placed on the St. James Methodist Church in Central City, Colorado, and dedicated July 13, 1947. The inscription on this marker was prepared by Dr. Martin Rist. "St. James Methodist Church, This church, one of the earliest in Colorado was organized July 10-11, 1859, by two missionaries, Rev. William H. Goode and Rev. Jacob Adriance. Rev. George R. Fisher, a wagon maker and lay preacher was the first resident pastor. For a while, services were held in the home of "Aunt" Clara Brown, a former slave. This building was begun in 1864, during the pastorate of the Rev. Bethuel T. Vincent, editor and publisher

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of the 'Rocky Mountain Sunday School Casket,' the first magazine in Colorado; but it was not completed and dedicated until 1782."

The next bronze plaque was placed on the Trinity Methodist Church in Denver. Bishop Glenn Randall Phillips preached the sermon at the service during which this plaque was presented to Trinity, and an article and picture appeared in **The Christian Advocate** concerning it. Unfortunately vandals have since removed this latter plaque.

At the Annual Historical Society Banquet at the Grant Avenue Methodist Church on February 10, 1948, Dr. William Campbell Wasser, who had given long and able leadership, announced to the Historical Society that he was resigning as President. Dr. Martin Rist was elected to replace him. As the work of the Historical Society progressed under the leadership of Dr. Rist, new historical materials began to appear with increasing frequency. In 1949, a diary of Jacob Adriance, one of the first two Methodist ministers in Colorado, was found in the Denver Public Library, and a copy secured and placed in the Archives of the Colorado Annual Conference. When the Iliff School of Theology began to plan for the building which was later to be known as the Ira J. Taylor Library, Dr. Rist saw to it that a room for historical archives would be included in the plan. Today this room is a reality, and is frequently used for research by those wishing to know more of the history of the area. Not only are many original documents preserved here, but also many microfilms of original documents preserved elsewhere are available in the Archives Room of the Taylor Library.

In 1952, Dr. Rist's work in the field of Church History achieved even wider recognition when he was elected President of the Western Jurisdictional Historical Society. That year the Historical Society, in Colorado took great pride in seeing Dr. Rist attend the meeting of the National Association of Methodist Historical Societies in Atlantic City.

On July 19, 1953, Dr. Rist preached at the Annual Pilgrimage and Homecoming at the St. James Methodist Church in Central City. His historical insights lent an unique flavor to this occasion. In that year also there was presented to the Historical Society through Dr. Rist a license to preach dated December 29, 1860, and issued to a Rev. J. B. Rowen signed by J. M. Chivington, P. E. In addition to this, another item of historical value, Vol. I, No. I of the **Rocky Mountain Sunday School Casket**, dated January, 1864, was presented to the Society. This was published by Dr. B. T. Vincent.

One of Martin Rist's pet projects has been the search for materials pertaining to the Methodist Episcopal Church South, as it once existed within the bounds of the Colorado Annual Conference. Much of this search has been successful and as a result there are now copies of the General Minutes of the Methodist Episcopal Church South and some District and Quarterly Conference records of that church available in the Taylor Library.

However, the quest for materials continues. In 1957, a History of Methodism in Utah, written by Henry L. Merkel, was placed in the Archives. In this year also it was discovered that a biography of John M. Chivington had been written by his son-in-law. Though the original document could not be obtained, the document was microfilmed and the microfilm placed in the Archives along with other new materials about Chivington which had come to light, such as his Masonic Record and various documents signed by him.

In 1958, the Colorado Conference Historical Society changed its name to the Rocky Mountain Conference Methodist Historical Society following the action of the Annual Conference. At the meeting of the Board of Directors of the Historical Society in 1958, the President advised the Directors of the fact that the old Grace Methodist Church, long a land mark in downtown Denver, was to be torn down; but he expressed the hope that one portion of this church building would not

be destroyed. Dr. Rist mentioned that the oldest part of the Grace Church building, the Evans Memorial Chapel, had been built by a great Methodist, Governor John Evans, and that it was probably the oldest extant church building in the city of Denver. The consequences of this are given in detail in Professor Scofield's article in the previous issue of this journal.

It was at this same meeting in 1958, that the announcement was made that Dr. Lowell B. Swan had discovered what was apparently a cabin used as a chapel by Father John L. Dyer. Dr. Rist helped Dr. Swan validate this discovery and the chapel building was subsequently moved to Fairplay, Colorado, to become an historical monument, and, with the St. James Church in Central City, a shrine of Methodism in Colorado.

But the Colorado Centennial was rapidly approaching, and thus the work of Dr. Rist and the Historical Society increased. Dr. Richard E. West discovered a painting of Father John L. Dyer created by Mr. Herndon Davis, a Denver artist. It was suggested that this painting be purchased by the Historical Society and Mr. Davis should be commissioned to paint pictures of three other Colorado Methodist pioneers, and the four pictures should be hung in the new Methodist Headquarters Building in Denver. Consequently, largely as a result of Dr. Rist's urging, the pictures of John L. Dyer, Jacob Adriance, William H. Goode and Henry Reitze were painted. For a time these pictures hung in the Pioneer Village constructed on the grounds of the Denver Civic Center for the celebration of the Colorado Centennial. There they were viewed by some 300,000 persons. Then they were removed to the Methodist Headquarters Building where they are conspicuously displayed. Recently the pictures of two other pioneer Methodists, Thomas Corwin Iliff, who had much to do with the founding of Methodism in Utah, and D. L. Rader, who performed a

similar function in Wyoming, have been added to the original four.

To commemorate the Centennial of Methodism in Colorado, the Historical Society authorized Dr. Rist to have copies made of the minutes of the first session of the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference, held in Denver City, Colorado Territory, July 10, 1863. These were made generally available. Dr. Rist also acted as a consultant and source of information for a drama written by Dr. Phillip Kaye and presented to the Annual Conference during the Centennial in 1959. Later he performed the same function for the Pageant, "Land of Promise," written by Dr. Russell Porter of the University of Denver, and presented to the General Conference when it met in Denver in 1960. Also during the Centennial Celebration of Methodism in Colorado, Dr. Rist prepared a History of Methodism in Colorado which he read to the Annual Conference. This was found to be of such value that the Historical Society had it reprinted and a copy given to every delegate to the General Conference in 1960. When that General Conference met in Denver, the first issue of the *Daily Christian Advocate* carried an article on the beginnings of Methodism in Colorado, written by Dr. Rist. Nor is this all of the writing Dr. Martin Rist has done to call attention to the history of Methodism in this area. At the annual dinner meeting of the Historical Society in 1960, Dr. Walter G. Williams announced that a history of Methodism in the United States was soon to be published by the Abingdon Press. Appreciation was expressed to Dr. Rist for collecting much of the material in this history.

But there is a great deal more to be learned about the history of Methodism in the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference. Many valuable materials have yet to be uncovered and much more of the story is still to be written. While this is true, we suspect that Dr. Rist will be searching out the materials and writing the story, and for this we are grateful.

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