

HERITAGE HORIZONS

NORTH AMERICAN BAPTIST HERITAGE COMMISSION

Celebrating a Rich Past ... Inspiring a Promising Future

FALL 2020

COVID-19 and The Heritage Commission

Randy Tschetter

The mission of the North American Baptist Heritage Commission (NABHC), located on the campus of Sioux Falls Seminary (SFS), is to preserve, organize and display the history of the North American Baptist (NAB) Conference. In spite of the disruptions brought on by a global pandemic, and social unrest, we in the Archives are doing our best to maintain a sense of normalcy as we do the work entrusted to us.

Since mid-March, access to the SFS campus has been limited to employees and a few tenants. This makes it possible to maintain social-distancing guidelines and maintain a safe work-environment. This is especially true for Heritage Commission personnel who can also gain entry to the Archives via a separate door and who some days work alone or with only 1 or 2 others at separate tables.

Darlene is currently (September 10) recovering from knee-replacement surgery but will return to her regular tasks in a few weeks. She has been busy sorting through boxes and files of historical documents related to NAB churches which are no longer in existence. *Luci* continues her volunteer work of researching and updating church histories. *Lana* has returned to her task of scanning issues of the

Baptist Herald which are then uploaded to the Heritage Commission webpage and Google for easy access. *Randy* has been organizing computer files, responding to online requests for information, and combing through 1000's of pages of correspondence relating primarily to NAB missions in Cameroon. He has discovered some fascinating stories and documents which are the focus of this issue of *Heritage Horizons*.

Although we are not able to receive visitors right now, we are still available to help you with your research projects and questions. Please feel free to contact us if you need information about your church or association and remember to send historical documents of significant church events such as anniversaries to us. Check out the Heritage Commission webpage at <https://nabconference.org/nab-heritage-commission/> for a list of books authored by NAB pastors and missionaries.





Some Thoughts About Missionaries and Purple Cows

Randy Tschetter

For the past several months, I have been on a “journey” of reviewing and appraising thousands of archived photos and pieces of correspondence relating to the ministries of North American Baptist (NAB) missionaries in Cameroon and Nigeria in the mid-20th century. What I anticipated to be a work-project of culling files, replacing rusty staples, and placing old documents in new acid-free folders has become an interesting journey of discovery into the inner-workings of a pre-digital-age foreign missions-program and the blessings and challenges of being a missionary. It is an amazing story of God’s providence and the faithfulness of the people we call NAB missionaries.

Over the years, I have met many of them – doctors, nurses, teachers, administrators, etc. In reading through the documents, I remembered a little poem I learned long ago:



*“I never saw a purple cow,
I never hope to see one,
But I can tell you anyhow,
I’d rather see than be one.”*

I certainly am not suggesting that the missionaries I have known were “purple cows,” but the last line of that poem – “I’d rather see than be one” – caught my attention. Being a missionary and a missions-administrator is hard work. From that perspective, I would rather just meet a missionary than actually be one. Current NAB missionary, Nancy Palmer defines being a

missionary like this:

“A missionary seems to be someone who does lots of things they don’t have training for or know how to do, but since someone needs to do it, with God’s help they do their best. In my case, I was stretched by homeschooling, writing lessons for the national church’s Women’s Union manual, and even sewing a windsock for the Mbingo airstrip. (I kid you not!)



My “journey” began as I sorted through a dozen or so boxes bearing the name of Laura Reddig – a missionary nurse in Cameroon for some 40 years, beginning in 1939. Included were 1000’s of well-organized and nicely identified photos of her time in Cameroon. Of particular interest to me

were photos of Laura lovingly caring for Leprosy patients (social outcasts in the 20th century much as they were in Jesus’ day). The albums also contained photos of Laura’s contemporaries such as Bee Westerman, Eleanor Weisenburger, and Daphne Dunger. Bee was a shy-small-town-girl from South Dakota whose call to missions and education led her to the development of schools in Cameroon – including the Saker Girl’s School in Victoria. Eleanor, who hailed from the village of Venturia in North Dakota invested some 40 years in Cameroon as a nurse / midwife. Daphne was

born in Cameroon to missionary parents and later returned to the land of her birth as a nurse / health worker. It is difficult to comprehend the amount of sacrifice these women, and many others, made on behalf of the NAB and God's kingdom.

Next, I turned my attention to written documents and correspondence between the NAB General Missions Secretary – namely Richard Schilke – and Cameroonian Field Secretaries such as Fred Folkerts and George W. Lang. As I read letters and reports about financial resources, recruitment and placement of missionaries, interpersonal relationships, vehicle use and maintenance, travel and deputation schedules, passports and visas, health concerns of missionaries, an automobile crash which led to the death of a missionary, a gasoline explosion which badly burned another missionary, and the deadly Lassa virus in 1969, I came to a new appreciation for the sacrifices missionaries faced, the challenges of difficult decisions, and above all, God's hand of blessing

on this NAB mission enterprise.

My notes on one particular missionary included the following items:

- I am arranging for delivery / installation of some WATER TANKS;
- I am purchasing PAINT;
- I need to buy CEMENT and SAND for a building project;
- At a minimum – we need to deal with the need for LATRINES;
- How do we dispose of GARBAGE?
- Our GENERATOR needed a new CRANKSHAFT;
- We have had to deal with some CATTLE RUSTLERS (perhaps an employee);
- We need KEROSENE;

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Those who desire to support the work of the Heritage Commission may continue to do so.

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Canadian gifts can be sent to PO Box 57235, Station A, Toronto, ON M5W 5M5.

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- I have the supplies for the construction of a CHICKEN HOUSE / etc.
- For the record, the primary calling of that missionary was to serve as a MEDICAL DOCTOR.

The issues mentioned above were in addition to the surgeries and patient contacts and hospital administration and oversight which were also required. As I recall, this missionary, at one point, was requested to create an organizational chart for the “comings and goings” of missionary doctors for the next 3 years – not a small task.

The importance of good leaders and the challenges which administrators dealt with must not be overlooked or dismissed. Below are just a few anecdotal notes which describe a wide variety of issues which required attention:

- We’re dealing with new rules and regulations for overtime pay for employees;
- “You need to spend more time preparing your prayer letters;”
- Missionary mom: “How can I send my 4th grader away to school for months at a time?”
- “Killer virus claims 3rd missionary victim” (Lassa Virus in Nigeria);
- Dear Govt official: “New Hope is in financial straits because we have not received the promised financial grants”
- “Enclosed is your flight / travel schedule”
- “I have exercised considerable grace /

restraint in this matter. As Field Secretary, one sometimes has to step on some reluctant toes”

- We are dealing with new rules and regulations for overtime pay for employees
- Dear Missionaries: “Be careful to not criticize the Cameroonian government;”
- To Insurance Company: “Your scales are inaccurate – You are charging us for more weight than we are sending”
- What happens if NAB is short of funds and has to recall missionaries?

Dear Dr. Schilke: “If you can find a short-term Dr, then Dr. A can go on furlough and Dr. B can move to Mbingo for 6 months and Nurse A can leave Nigeria so Dr. C can spend 6 months in Warwar and Dr. B can go back to Nigeria and Nurse B can instruct / teach Dr. C about tropical medicine . . . it all depends

So much for my reflections on missionaries and purple cows. I am grateful for the sacrifices which so many individuals have made and those whom I have known personally. I am quite sure I could not have done what they did or are doing. What began as a simple project of purging old files has become an eye-opening journey of seeing God’s blessing upon the work in Cameroon and Nigeria in the face of great challenges. Some day I may have time to research the stories of NAB missions and missionaries in places like Japan and Brazil.



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