

RE-CREATING JOHN WESLEY IN THE WORLD METHODIST MUSEUM

Frank Baker¹

My wife Nellie and I were present when this building was officially opened at 4 p.m. on Sunday, September 2nd, 1956. I remember vividly that we arrived hot and sweating, because we had underestimated the effort required, even from English walkers, for an after-lunch stroll around the lake—between four and five miles. I have not suggested to Nellie that we should repeat that circuit of the lake to celebrate this its 29th anniversary. But I do want to celebrate what this museum has become, and to celebrate its founders, and the founder of the Methodism which inspired it. And I am attempting to accomplish this by a reminiscing ramble through the years, with the World Methodist Museum as my starting point, the rediscovery of John Wesley as my primary goal, and the glory of God as my ultimate goal.

In 1956 I was already a good friend of the man from whose mind the museum sprang, Dr. Elmer T. Clark. In 1947 the Ecumenical Methodist Council had appointed me as joint-secretary with Dr. Clark of the newly-revived and renamed International Methodist Historical Society—now the World Methodist Historical Society. At the same time Elmer was the executive secretary of the World Methodist Council, and for another four years the editor of *World Outlook*. We had met, broken bread, conversed, and corresponded on many occasions. I had discussed with him many of his wide-ranging and imaginative schemes, though I could only admire at a distance his uncanny ability to secure financial underpinning for those schemes. The erection of this building and the formation of this museum was the result of Dr. Clark's imagination and initiative rather than of anything or anyone else.

The inaugural meeting of the executive committee of the new World Methodist Historical Society was held in Westminster Central Hall, London, on November 18, 1947. For some years I have been the only surviving member of that small original group, which consisted of Dr. William E. Sangster, Dr. Duncan Coomer, Bishop Paul N. Garber, Dr. Maldwyn Edwards, Dr. Clark, and myself. On that occasion we founded the all-purpose magazine envisioned by Dr. Clark, for which I suggested the name *World Parish*. This became the literary organ of his many enterprises. In 1962 its functions were separated into two publications, the small monthly bulletin published under that same continuing title by the World Methodist Council, and the scholarly journal entitled *Methodist History*, which had long been one of Dr. Clark's major goals.

For many years Dr. Clark had dreamed also of a joint home at Lake Junaluska for the two world organizations of which he was now the chief executive. He saw this, however, not simply as a centre for organization, but as a focal point for Methodist culture, served by a Methodist

¹Frank Baker presented this paper at the anniversary of the World Methodist Museum in 1985. It remained unpublished at his death, and is found in Box 204 of The Frank Baker Papers, in the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Duke University, Durham, NC.

library and a Methodist museum. In world-ranging travels he had already accumulated many thousands of volumes and artifacts devoted to this major enterprise, making many shrewd purchases from his own income as well as from the funds of the two great bodies which he represented.

Dr. Clark died in 1966. His work continued and prospered under new leaders. There were new visions of expansion. After years of research and negotiations, in 1978 the General Council on Finance and Administration of The United Methodist Church approved the relocation of the headquarters of the Commission of Archives and History in a specially erected building on the campus of Drew University. It was several years before this complex move was completed. Nor was it a simple or lightly undertaken task to divide a magnificent collection into two portions, approximately equal in financial value, yet somewhat different in primary function. The museum was to remain at the World Methodist Council headquarters, and the library to be transported to serve the Commission of Archives and History at its new headquarters in New Jersey.

The separation, painful as it was, did have its compensations, including the enlargement of the space available for the museum and the opportunity for a much more imaginative display of its treasures, both the old and the new which continued to accumulate, or were specially commissioned for its new format. Providentially a dynamic leader was on hand to respond to the challenge. Coming into office as General Secretary of the World Methodist Council ten years after Dr. Clark's death, Dr. Joe Hale has also been a world traveler with a strong missionary outlook, and an avid collector of Wesleyana. Even more noteworthy has been his strong spiritual commitment, and an added familiarity with the best of modern museums, distinguished by their attractive displays of representative items in a series of related themes. With hearty cooperation from a host of colleagues, Joe worked wonders. Elmer Clark must be proud, as well as grateful to Almighty God, for what has been erected on the foundation which here he laid.

The Functions of the World Methodist Museum. "Museum" comes from a Greek word meaning the seat of the Muses, nine sister goddesses who inspired learning and the arts, from which we derive also the word "muse"—meditate, ponder. The term was first applied to the museum at Alexandria, the centre of the culture of the ancient world. The function of that museum was to preserve and to display the products and learning of the past in order to illuminate and inspire the culture of the future. Throughout the world there are hundreds of major museums devoted to the arts and to the sciences, and occasionally to different aspects of religion. All have the same general function, but also their own special strengths and emphases. This World Methodist Museum is worthy to be ranked among their number, and is making its own special contribution both to the present and the future.

Clearly this museum must dedicate itself to keeping alive the spirit and witness of Methodism throughout the world. We must think especially of our founders and fathers, but also of the life of ordinary church members in every country. Surely those pioneers of earlier generations must be kept alive—or brought to new historical life—so that they can readily be visualized by members of this and of future generations. Towering above all others, of course, is John Wesley. It is also worthwhile and important, however, to re-create his pupil and colleague George Whitefield, his brother Charles, and his marvelous mother Susanna, to whom Dr. Lee Tuttle, Dr. Clark's immediate successor, dedicated the neighbouring garden. And there are a host of other leaders in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries who should be commemorated. Like the pilgrims to this museum, they come from the United States and the

British Isles; from Angola, Argentina, and Australia; from Belgium, Brazil, and Burma; from Canada, Chile, and China; Fiji and France; Germany and Ghana; Hong Kong, India, Ireland, and Italy; from Kenya and Korea, Liberia, Mexico, and New Zealand; from Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, and Portugal; from Samoa, Sierra Leone, Spain, and Sri Lanka; from Tonga and Uruguay; from Zambia and Zimbabwe. As followers of John Wesley, the whole world is our parish.

I think that in this inaugural lecture it is important for us to have glimpsed the beginnings of this museum in the context of the functions of museums in general, and of the World Methodist Museum in particular. I now wish to look at the paramount human figure among those to whom it is devoted, and to see how we may re-create John Wesley so that he becomes more alive for our generation. And I would like to do this mainly—though not solely—by means of the museum’s own holdings, both those on display in the showcases, and especially those usually out of sight on the shelves and in the cabinets and drawers, the underpinnings of any good museum. I suggest and will attempt to illustrate my belief that every museum, and this especially, should address itself to all aspects of the human personality: to the mind, by securing information; to the heart, by sparking the imagination; to the soul, by stimulating inspiration; and even to the will, by strengthening the resolve to action.

Securing Information. A museum should be a centre for research, and this one has been of immense help to me personally in helping to correct misinformation and fill out the truth. And in my turn I have tried in a small way to help the museum. In some album or folder there resided an item which I supplied to Dr. Clark some forty years ago on loan; it was returned many months ago. It is, I believe, unique. Because this item represents a major enrichment of our knowledge of the Wesley family, its story is perhaps worth telling in some detail.

It is a photograph—only a photograph—of a Wesley document dated 1703. Forty years ago I took action on my doubts about the statements of the Epworth historians that as the parish registers had apparently gone up in flames with the rectory in 1709, “the entries of the baptisms of John and Charles Wesley are lost, probably for ever.”² In 1948 I was allowed access to the resources of the diocesan registry in Lincoln, England, and discovered that a number of the annual transcripts made by Samuel Wesley from his parish registers did survive. (Strangely enough the rector himself had forgotten this when he prepared baptismal certificates for John’s ordinations in 1725 and 1728.) Sure enough, there in the Diocesan Registry at Lincoln was a long parchment slip in the hand of John’s father, signed, “Sam: Wesley, Rector,” and countersigned by the two church wardens for that year. Among the baptisms, dated July 3, 1703, was the entry: “John, s[on] of Samuel & Susanna Wesley.” Not a few hours after his birth, you note—he was born June 17. And not with the name “John Benjamin,” in spite of Jonathan Crowther’s testimony that these were the beliefs of John Wesley himself.³ This was a titbit of

²O. Mordaunt Burrows, *Epworth, The Home of the Wesleys* (Epworth: Barnes & Breeze, [1936]), 13. Cf. A. F. Messiter, *Epworth Parish Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Elliot Stock, 1912), 7–8.

³Jonathan Crowther, *Portraiture of Methodism*, 2nd edn. (London: Edwards, 1815), 20. This not only gives the rector’s certification that John was “baptized a few hours after his birth” on “the 17th of June,” but also testifies: “I have heard him say that he was baptized by the name

information indeed! Along with similar transcripts at Lincoln, this document has enabled us to prepare a much fuller and more accurate genealogy of the Wesley family than was previously possible.

Naturally people want more information about the physical characteristics of Wesley, who is indeed *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, to use the title—and heartily to commend—the two volumes prepared by my colleague Dr. Heitzenrater.⁴ We can add to his own testimony the evidence of portraits and prints to show that he was constant in height and weight at 5' 3" and 126 pounds, and that he had long wavy hair parted in the middle, almost black, with a brown sheen, and that he retained his clear complexion to advanced age.⁵ But what about the question put to me by Willie Snow Ethridge when she was preparing her novel, *Strange Fires*: “What colour were John Wesley’s eyes?” My reply was that they were a dark hazel brown, with a glint of green, and that in his later years they turned to blue. This information came in part from a rare periodical,⁶ but you may confirm it for yourself by studying the magnificent portrait by J. M. Williams, R.A., even in the frontispiece of the *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*.

Wesley has become best known to his followers, however, not by his portraits but by his writings. Now that we are well embarked on the Bicentennial Edition of John Wesley’s Works, new information about his massive publishing activities is always welcome. Again going the extra mile with the known facts and using the imagination may help to bring new details to light. On my last visit to Lake Junaluska I discovered that a seemingly ordinary display case item, Samuel Wesley’s Latin dissertations on the book of Job, is in fact unique and specially interesting. Bound into it is the original 1735 title-page, so far the only example known apart from that in the bulky presentation volume which Wesley handed to Queen Caroline just before setting sail for Georgia.⁷ John Wesley had not enjoyed his extended toil over many years on his father’s magnum opus, and his Latin inscription at the end might well be translated, “Thank God that’s over!”⁸ Arduous and monotonous and minutely detailed though they might be, however, John Wesley’s multifarious labours on *Job* furnished an invaluable literary apprenticeship. They

of John Benjamin; that his mother had buried two sons, one called John, and the other Benjamin, and that she united their names in him. But he never made use of the second name.”

⁴[Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1984).]

⁵Willie Snow Ethridge, *Strange Fires: the True Story of John Wesley’s Love Affair in Georgia* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1971).

⁶*Wesley’s Chapel Magazine*, Vol. 7, No. 28 (1937), pp. 10–13.

⁷The copy for the queen is in the British Library, London, with the shelfmark “8.h.7.” The World Methodist Museum copy was also an imperfect copy specially prepared for presentation, inscribed on behalf of John Wesley to John Ogilvie, whose name is not present in the printed list of subscribers which appeared in 1736 to accompany the completed copies officially issued that year. To indicate that the simpler 1735 title-page was a cancel sheet, shortly to be replaced, the printer had made a long tear at its foot.

⁸Samuel Wesley, *Dissertationes in Librum Jobi* (London: William Bowyer, 1735), 599: “*Gloria Intellectuum Datori. Laus Deo Semper. Collationis Libri Jobi FINIS*”—“Glory to the Giver of understanding. Praise to God for ever. The end of the collation of the Book of Job.”

prepared him for fifty fruitful years of publishing to the glory of God. After *Job* he printed over four hundred works which even now are of great theological and historical and spiritual significance to the whole religious world.

Wesley demonstrated supreme skill in publishing not only his own writings but in excerpting and abridging the works of others so as to increase their spiritual impact. Rarely did he meet with an unappreciative author. But it did happen. Here at Lake Junaluska is Wesley's letter of December 12, 1744, in which he offered to indemnify Robert Dodsley for transgressing the copyright law by printing selections from Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* in his *Collection of Moral and Sacred Poems*.⁹

Also here is one of the most important letters revealing some of the details of Wesley's handling of his publishing ventures. This was written on May 6, 1774,¹⁰ the year when he completed the publication of his collected works in 32 volumes—an event which we celebrated when we changed the title of our much more ambitious twentieth-century venture from the Oxford Edition to The Bicentennial Edition. Wesley wrote about the sales of *Thoughts upon Slavery*, and requested that supplies should be sent to him on his travels, at Edinburgh, Newcastle, and Scarborough. He wrote about paying the printers in London and Bristol, and was unusually specific about the costs and the sizes of pages and editions of his writings: "Let Mr. Hawes print all the little things that are yet wanting (sometimes 1500, sometimes two or three thousand in an edition). For 1500 copies (forty-two lines in a page) I pay him 26 shillings a sheet." He ended with plans to secure a new book steward, complaining, "In many circuits they have no more than 25 volumes of the *Works* to this day. ... The books were never yet duly propagated through the kingdom. But surely it is possible." Even in these advanced days such sentiments are occasionally echoed by the Abingdon Press.

We could do with a little more information about many aspects of Wesley's life, of course. We do not sufficiently appreciate, for instance, his wry underplayed humour, as when, in another letter at Lake Junaluska, he gently chided Alex Suter for marrying too hastily without consulting Wesley, or even informing him of his bride's maiden name. (This was written on May 25, 1790, when Wesley was nearly 87):

"My Dear Brother,

On Midsummer day (if [I] am here so long) you may, after having asked advice of five sensible and faithful men and three women, of whom you have had sufficient experience (for we cannot be too wary in matters of such importance), and after you have deliberated with yourselves two hours in a bright starlight night (if the moon shine, nay, and glitter upon the sea, it may be so much the better), you may perhaps venture to discover what your wife's name *was* to

Your Affectionate Friend and Brother,

⁹See Frank Baker, ed. *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, 2 vols. (Oxford; then Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1982ff), 26:119 and illus.

¹⁰[WMC Museum, 2002.001.010; published in the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 32 (1959): 45.]

Sparkling the Imagination. A museum, above all places, can correct and fill out not only the bare facts of family history and activities, but may also help us to visualize personally, in three dimensions, both Wesley and other Methodists. The museum has assembled a remarkable collection of paintings, engravings, plaques, and the like. There are few persons in history before this technological age who have prompted the creation of so many graven images as John Wesley. And an exceptionally large proportion of these are to be found here at Lake Junaluska. As well as the valuable Hitt portrait by a contemporary of Wesley’s, here is a magnificent portrait by a leading modern painter, Frank Salisbury. This was based not only on sittings by a descendant of the Wesley family, but by an accumulation of Wesley’s personal relics, and most of all by the famous Enoch Wood bust, which Wesley himself, as well as his preacher Adam Clarke, considered the best representation of him in the round.

Yet a casual glance at this famous bust is not sufficient. Careful study, indeed, is usually necessary if the imagination is really to come alive. It seems that Wesley was 81 when he sat to Enoch Wood. He was an old man, and Wood faithfully portrayed him as an old man, down to the wrinkled flesh and the swollen vein leading down his right forehead to the bridge of his nose. Here in this museum you have the rare opportunity of studying this bust carefully, and also of comparing it with many of the later and inferior copies, from which the wrinkles and veins, and other distinctive features, progressively disappeared. (If possible, read Dr. Harold Crowder’s article in the *Encyclopedia of World Methodism* on “Wesley Pottery and Busts.”) Even though only a handful of the originals still remain, these busts were a major inspiration for many thousands, even millions, of mementos of Wesley in three dimensions or two, busts and prints of Wesley treasured by generations of men and women in all lands who have admired Wesley sufficiently to cherish his likeness.

Our mental pictures of John Wesley as a person have too long been conventional stereotypes which also need imaginative re-creation. Eleven years ago I attempted this in a minor way in an address on “The Real John Wesley.” In this I described him as a radical conservative, a thoughtful activist, a charming autocrat, a romantic realist, and above all and in all as a man of God.¹² I do not propose to tread that path again, nor is there great need. With Dr. Heitzenrater’s two volumes to stimulate us, we may seek the elusive Mr. Wesley afresh for ourselves, and find him as we have never found him before. But with this man there still remain new dimensions to be visualized by glimpses in little-known documents, or by perusing old documents from a new angle. We may learn to understand him with our heart as well as with our mind. A few instances must suffice.

Perhaps we have not realized how deeply Wesley loved America and tried to keep in touch with American Methodism. Read one of his letters written during the Revolutionary War, preserved in the museum here. (Do not expect, of course, to find him writing in 1777 from the point of view of those who sought independence!):

¹¹[WMC Museum, 2002.001.029.]

¹²“The Real John Wesley, *Methodist History* 12.4 (July 1974): 183–97.

“I have just received two letters from New York; one of them from George Robinson, late of Newcastle. They inform me that all the Methodists there were firm for the government, and on that account persecuted by the rebels, only not to the death; that the preachers are still threatened, but not stopped; and the work of God increases much in Maryland and Virginia.”¹³

One of the most frequently used words in Wesley’s vocabulary is “rules,” and we are sometimes irritated by his autocracy. There was an instinctive desire in Wesley for discipline, and those with insight came to appreciate the value of this trait. His insistence upon law and order, even within the ranks of Methodism, is illustrated by a sentence from a Junaluska letter of December 1780 to one of his English preachers: “Now observe the *Minutes of the Conference* in every article.”¹⁴ We note that this referred to the recently published edition of his *Large Minutes*, which four years later formed the basis and bulk of the first American *Discipline*—for his American followers also believed in law and order, even *his* law and order!

John Wesley was a caring person, concerned for the body as well as the soul. We illustrate from another Junaluska letter about the health of one of his female members who apparently suffered from swollen legs: “You did quite right in spending a short time at Margate. Sea-bathing is a noble remedy. But if any weakness remains, you should add another, a laced stocking either of linen or dimity [a very tough patterned cloth], lacing it on every morning, as tight as you can without giving pain.”¹⁵

Stimulating Inspiration. By the very nature of their background and commitment, however, Methodists come to this museum expecting a stimulus not only to their minds and imagination but to their souls. From the outset various features have been devoted to preserving the spirit of Methodism as well as information about it. This is worthily encapsulated in the very notepaper on which our President, Mrs. Cochran, welcomed me as lecturer, with its printed motto at the foot, “From Memory to Ministry.”

Two remarkable new treasures emphasize the spiritual purposes of the Museum. The Christ window highlights the Saviour of the World, with arms open to all the nations and all denominations. The Wesley window shows our Methodist founder proclaiming a faith for the world, surrounded by some of the host of Methodist witnesses who followed in his steps, now linked into the World Methodist Council. Appropriately this window pays tribute to Dr. Lee F.

¹³January 11, 1777, addressed to his preacher Joseph Benson at Newcastle [WMC Museum, 2002.001.011].

¹⁴December 14, 1780, addressed to his preacher Jeremiah Brettel in Plymouth Dock [WMC Museum, 2002.001.015].

¹⁵September 5, 1783, to Sarah [Purnell] [WMC Museum, 2002.001.019]. Neither of these remedies appear in Wesley’s *Primitive Physic* [Volume 32 in the *Works*], though ailment 25, recipe 4 [Works, 32:142] recommends dipping linen rags in an extract of lead for a deep burn or scald; Wesley also prescribed sea water for shingles (ailment 201, recipe 1 [32:228]) and swollen glands in the neck (ailment 236, recipe 1 [32:239]); bandages were prescribed for soft and flabby swellings (ailment 238, recipe 3 [32:239]), and cold wet cloths for inability to sleep (ailment [272], recipe 1 [32:251]).

Tuttle, Elmer Clark's successor as General Secretary of the Council from 1961 to 1976, when Dr. Joe Hale took over. The renewed and enlarged World Methodist Museum was dedicated during the meetings of the North American Section of the World Methodist Council in July 1983, and has more than merited the enthusiastic response of its hundreds of thousands of visitors from all over the world.

One of the most inspiring of the new exhibits is the replica of the mighty Aldersgate memorial recently erected in London, recalling Wesley's testimony of May 24, 1738, as first published in his *Journal*: "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death."¹⁶

Although he had his low moments, as well as his high ones, the remaining fifty and more years of Wesley's life were devoted to proclaiming the saving love of God, and glorifying God by his own work and witness. Stirred by the Wesley window and the mural depicting Wesley preaching at the Epworth market cross, can we not visualize Wesley, with hand stretched out from his simple, small, portable wooden pulpit, a little man lifted above his expectant hearers, that he himself might lift up a saving Christ? Can we not be assured that this message of salvation proclaimed in the open air to a small group or a large crowd was of far more importance to him than any decorous or magnificent setting, even though he was a man who preferred that all things be done decently and in order? To Wesley the message mattered above all. The message was the meaning of his life.

He was within a year of his death when he wrote a concerned letter to his nephew Samuel, a letter which must surely be extant somewhere in private hands—perhaps one day it might be secured for this collection. It is written by a man nearing 86 to a rather worldly one of 34, who for some years had been flirting with the Roman Catholic Church. Because it is long only brief extracts are possible:

"Dear Sammy,

For some days you have been much upon my mind. ... I fear you want (what you least of all suspect), the greatest thing of all—religion. I do not mean external religion, but the religion of the heart. ... I care not a rush for your being called a Papist or [a] Protestant. But I am grieved at your being an heathen. Certain it is that the general religion both of Protestants and Catholics is no better than refined heathenism.

O Sammy, you are called to something better than this! You are called to know and love the God of Glory. ... Hearken to the advice of one that stands on the edge of eternity. In spite of prejudice, go and hear that word which is able to save your soul. Give God your heart. Consider these, my dear Sammy, as probably the dying words of

Your Affectionate Uncle,

¹⁶JW, *Works*, 18:250.

Epilogue

Perhaps for us, with our minds and hearts and souls stirred by the examples of John Wesley and his earlier followers, and eager to play a worthy part in a very different age, he would offer words both of encouragement and challenge similar to those which he wrote to the pioneer of Methodist Sunday Schools, Hannah Ball, in a letter held by the museum:

“My dear Sister,

Nothing can be more certain than that God is willing to give always what he gives once, and that therefore whatever you experience now you may enjoy to your life’s end. ... Watch and pray, and you will not enter into temptation. ... Press on, into the whole image of God .”¹⁸

Press on, in faith, hope, and love, in experience and in service! And in all your trials as well as your triumphs recollect the words of John Wesley on his deathbed, when asked whether he had any message for his followers. Elizabeth Ritchie wrote the account, which within a week was printed and being circulated to Wesley’s friends:

“He paused a little, and then with all the remaining strength he had, cried out, ‘The best of all is, God is with us!’ And then, as if to assert the faithfulness of our promise-keeping Jehovah, and comfort the hearts of his weeping friends, lifting up his dying arm in token of victory, and raising his feeble voice with a holy triumph not to be expressed, [he] again repeated the heart-reviving words, ‘The best of all is, God is with us!’”¹⁹

Wesley’s words are still true.

Frank Baker

¹⁷April 29, 1790, known only from a reduced photograph secured by John Telford from the collection of the Revd. L. H. Wellesley-Wesley for its publication in 1931. [It is now part of The Green Collection, Oklahoma City, GC.PPR.002530.]

¹⁸December 24, 1768 [WMC Museum, Elmer T. Clark Collection].

¹⁹[Elizabeth Ritchie, *An Authentic Narrative of the Circumstances Relative to the Departure of the late Rev. John Wesley* (Bristol: Bulgin & Rosser, 1791), 13.]