

Bishop's Sand Creek Massacre Blog
Entry #3, February 19, 2014

Your Questions and Comments

Q: You mention only Methodists. The UMC “united” Methodists and Evangelical United Brethren. Do EUBs have a role in this history?

A: Only Methodists from the Methodist Episcopal Church of the time came to Colorado in 1859, sent by the Methodist Conference. German-speaking “Methodists” from the EUB branches came later. The Sand Creek Massacre involved leaders in the Methodist Episcopal Church. But we all inherit the history of both branches of Methodism. And we can all contribute to the healing.

Q: You say the Sand Creek Massacre sign is in Wyoming, but wasn't the Massacre was in southeastern Colorado?

A: The Massacre occurred on the plains east of Pueblo in southeastern Colorado, but it largely accomplished its goal of expelling Native Peoples from eastern Colorado. Survivors fled north and east. Today, four descendant tribes are recognized: Northern Cheyenne in southeastern Montana, Northern Arapaho on the Wind River Reservation of Wyoming and the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes (southern) located in Oklahoma. The State of Wyoming posted signs along highways marking the trail survivors took as they fled.

<http://wyoshpo.state.wy.us/pdf/SandCreekBrochure.pdf>

Methodists Arrive in Colorado

Summer 2009. Sesquicentennials.

In the whirlwind of my first year as bishop of the Denver Area, I preached in many places, and celebrated a number of church anniversaries. In the summer of 2009 I was scheduled to preach at St. James UMC in Central City, Colorado, for the sesquicentennial (150 year) anniversary of the church's founding. Also I was aware that later in the year I would be present to help celebrate 150 years at FUMC Golden, Boulder and Trinity UMC in Denver.

As I prepared for the celebration at Central City, I researched the history of the town and the church. For the first time I realized that this event not only celebrated this congregation, it marked the entrance of Methodism into Colorado. In those sermons I celebrated the faithfulness

and resilience of those early pioneers. In the summer of 2009 I did not yet realize how the arrival of Methodism was related to the departure of Native Peoples.



***St. James UMC, Central City, Colorado
Sesquicentennial Sermon (excerpts)
July 12, 2009
Bishop Elaine J. W. Stanovsky***

Well, here we are. In Central City, Colorado, trying to imagine and remember what it was like 150 years ago, when Methodist churches were organized in communities sprouting up following the discovery of gold.

In July 1858 gold was discovered near the mouth of Little Dry Creek, in what is now Englewood, Colorado, not far from where I live.

November 1858 the Larimer Party from eastern Kansas staked a claim at the confluence of the South Platte River and Cherry Creek in what would develop into Denver.

In January of 1859 in Idaho Springs.

In May between what is now Central City and Black Hawk.

What was this place like 150 years ago? The people who “rushed” here in 1859 were not settlers. They were adventurers. Men who set out with a pickaxe and a mule in search of treasure. The only thing that drew them to this land was the lure of gold. If the land had proved poor, they would have moved on. They were followed by wave upon wave of opportunity seekers. People flooding in to seek their fortune, and others to take advantage of the fortune seekers. These were times when the frontier was a place from which men extracted wealth: trappers, loggers, miners. When the resources were depleted, the people moved on.

And life was hard. There were no farms, no cattle, no local source of sustenance, no transportation systems. No schools. No library, no health care, no funeral home, no newspaper. No law enforcement or criminal justice system.

Miners died, leaving widows and orphans. Fires broke out, leaving the community devastated. Vice of every kind followed the opportunity seekers and left individuals and communities ravaged by disease, drunkenness, violence, corruption.

And yet, among those who came were people on another path. People of faith, who pursued treasure not of this earth, and brought faith and community with them.

In 1858, as part of the Larimer Party in 1858, came George Fisher, a carpenter and wagon-maker entered this land. He was also a Methodist lay preacher. And he followed the wave of claims to the mountains and new gold discoveries that led him to Central City.

Within four months of the discovery of gold in Idaho Springs, the Methodist Episcopal Conference of Nebraska and Kansas authorized a mission to “gold country” in Colorado. Can you imagine? Two years before Colorado was established as a territory; 17 years before Colorado became a state, people gathered in Central City for church and class meeting and Sunday school.

People of faith knew the urgent needs of people in these new communities. And they came in on horseback with the others, ready to provide an alternative to the lawlessness and violence and self-destruction that was so much a part of the early days in every one of these communities.

The church gathered for prayer, and for Sunday School – before there were other schools – and for worship. It hosted the first circulating library in Colorado.

This sesquicentennial year is shared with sister churches: Trinity in Denver, First UMC in Golden and First UMC in Boulder, all organized out of the gold rush of 1859.

We remember the names of some of the pioneers of the faith in this community:

George Fisher

Bishop Levi Scott

William Goode

Jacob Adriance

*Presiding elder, **John Chivington**, who like all of us had his light side and his dark, being largely responsible for the Sand Creek Massacre of Native Americans five years later.*

***Aunt Clara Brown**, a former slave known as “the colored pioneer” who hosted the organizing meeting of the new church.*

Mr. Hugh Lawry, lay pastor during a lean time

Mrs. C. O. Richards, who kept the Sunday School going during a time without a pastor

Charles Auger, who collected memories for the centennial celebration in 1959.

53 pastors in first 100 years and more since.

We will never know the fullness of the struggles of their lives, the struggles of their faith, the trials and hardships they endured. We only receive the inheritance of their faith and their faithfulness.

As I learned more, I would come to tell the story differently. More later.