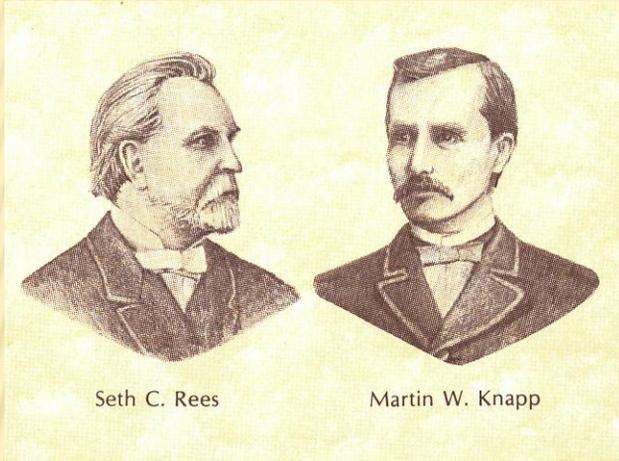


MARTIN W. KNAPP & SETH C. REES

Our Wesleyan History



TWO PILGRIMS' PROGRESS

By Lee Haines
Historian of The Wesleyan Church

On March 27, 1853, Martin Wells Knapp was born in a log cabin in southern Michigan. His parents were Jared, a courageous, shouting Methodist class leader, and Octavia (Wells), a quiet, but consistent Christian.

With fifty dollars received from selling a calf, Martin enrolled at 17 at a Methodist college in Albion, Michigan. His father was frequently ill, so Martin did the farm work in the summer, studying Greek and Latin at night, and attending classes in Albion during the winter.

At Albion he met his first wife, Lucy J. Glenn. He was not yet a Christian, and when he began corresponding with her, her first inclination was to end the whole matter. But she felt checked by the Holy Spirit and began praying for him.

Martin was converted at 19 through Lucy's prayers and his mother's example. Soon he received his call to preach. When he was 23, he and Lucy were married.

Knapp's first pastorate was a circuit assigned to him in 1877 by the Methodist Michigan Conference. He had always been extremely shy. He was only five feet four inches in height and 120 pounds in weight. His biographer, A. M. Hills, says that "the various parts and members of his body,... seemed as if they had been thrown together... by some laughable in accident of nature." His first impression upon strangers was always unfavorable. The Lord overruled man's reactions on that first

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pastorate, and Knapp was allowed to stay long enough to reveal that he was a man of God.

A turning point in Knapp's life came on his second pastorate in November 1882. He had long been wrestling with the inner bent to sinning. Under the ministry of William Taylor, later the great missionary bishop of the Methodist Church, he claimed the blessing "now" in a revival at one of his own churches.

In 1886, Knapp published his first book, *Christ Crowned Within*, being forced to auction off his furniture to finance this venture. In 1887 the Michigan Conference permitted him to step out of the pastorate so he could follow the calling of an evangelist. The following year, in his mother's kitchen, he started *The Revivalist*, a periodical devoted to the promotion of holiness.

During 1889-90, Martin W. Knapp went through a two-year valley of ill health, financial crises, and family illnesses. The worst blow of all came on September 5, 1890, when Lucy died after an extended illness, leaving him with two small children.

In 1892, Knapp was married again, this time to Minnie C. Ferle, and transferred his base of operations to Cincinnati. During this period he impressed A. M. Hills as being "a little bundle of nerves and brain and heart, all alive and on fire for God and holiness."

Knapp set up a publishing house for holiness literature in the YMCA building. He

Martin Wells Knapp, anointed by the Spirit and aflame with his own zeal, overcame severe personal disadvantages and the stubborn opposition of others to do a great work for God. Dying at an early age, he left behind dynamic institutions perpetuating his message of holiness unto the Lord.

Established the Salvation Park Camp Meeting. In 1900 he purchased a two-acre

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tract, containing two large buildings, and founded God's Bible School there. The following year he built a new tabernacle on the campus for his camp meeting.

Knapp sounded loudly and clearly the call for holiness missionary work. He enlisted missionaries and through his paper and camp meeting raised funds to send them. Charles and Lettie Cowman visited his school in its opening weeks, changed their missionary plans from school teaching to evangelism, and went to Japan to establish the Oriental Missionary Society.

In September 1897, the International Holiness Union and Prayer League was organized in Knapp's home. Seth C. Rees was elected president and Martin W. Knapp vice president. The little band of about a dozen assembled there was intended to be an inter-denominational society promoting holiness revivals and missions. But it was to grow into the Pilgrim Holiness Church, which would eventually help form The Wesleyan Church.

By early 1901 it was evident to Knapp's friends that he had overextended himself. He fell victim to typhoid fever and his tired body had no resources with which to defend itself. His ministry continued even on his sickbed as he inquired of the nurses if they were on their way to heaven. He died December 7, 1901, at the age of 48, leaving behind him various thriving institutions, each in its own way perpetuating his influence and his message.

Seth C. Rees was born in Westfield, Indiana, August 6, 1854. His parents, Zechariah and Luzena Rees, were faithful Quakers from North Carolina who had moved to the Hoosier wilderness and built a log cabin. The Friends Academy at Westfield furnished Seth what formal education he was to receive.

In March, 1873, Seth was converted. During a protracted meeting, he went to a Monday morning service and confessed his need. Just after his nineteenth birthday, he attended the Quaker quarterly meeting in Westfield. Under the Spirit's prompting, Seth mounted a pile of dirt and preached his first sermon.

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Before his conversion, Seth had visited an uncle 75 miles from his home. A girl staying there, Hulda Johnson, saw Seth coming and declared that there was her future husband. She was a backslider, but after Seth's conversion he returned to the neighborhood for services and Hulda was reclaimed. He began corresponding with her, visiting her only once before their engagement. They were married in December 1876.

It was near the close of his first pastorate in 1883, that Rees found a "second rest" in the cleansing and infilling work of the Holy Spirit. His conviction for entire sanctification was far more intense than that for conversion. Gradually he said yes to each demand of the Spirit, and there came a sense of tranquility followed by a conscious filling.

For a time the Reeses went west to minister to the Madoc, Cherokee, and Peoria Indians. They then returned to pastoring, including a period at Raisin Valley near Adrian, Michigan, where Rees probably served as the pastor of Laura Smith Haviland. From 1894 to 1896, Rees and his wife served as pastors of the Emanuel Church in Providence, Rhode Island, where over one thousand were converted.

Then, convinced that they were not getting the gospel out fast enough, they returned to evangelism. A trip to Cincinnati brought Rees into touch with Martin Wells Knapp. The two were alike in spirit and objectives although quite different in appearance. Rees was a tall, heavily built, impressive-looking man who had earned the nickname of "Earthquaker" due to the powerful manner in which he preached.

In 1897 Rees joined Knapp in founding the International Holiness Union and Prayer League, serving as its president or superintendent until 1905.

Seth C. Rees, the "Earthquaker," shook a nation with his preaching of holiness. He was used of God at three key points in history of what was to become the Pilgrim Holiness Church – at its beginnings, in the merger of a tributary group, and in reorganization that enabled it to live and grow.

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In 1898, Hulda the “Pentecostal prophetess,” died. In November 1899, Set married Frida Marie Stromberg of Providence, Rhode Island. On their wedding trip they held a revival in South Carolina in which there were one thousand seekers.

In 1905, four years after Martin W. Knapp’s death, Seth C. Rees severed connection for a time with the various institutions centered in Cincinnati. In 1901 he had founded his first rescue home for girls and women in Chicago, and in the years that followed he opened a total of ten such homes from coast to coast.

In 1912, Rees moved to Pasadena, California, and there in June 1917, he organized a small denomination known as the Pilgrim Church. They were soon producing a periodical known as *The Pilgrim*. A Bible training school was started. Foreign missions were promoted vigorously, with the most significant result being the sending of Francisco and Nettie Soltero to Mexico in 1920.

In 1922 the Pilgrim Church merged with the organization Rees had helped to start in Cincinnati 25 years earlier, now known as the International Holiness Church. As a result of the merger, the new name adopted was the Pilgrim Holiness Church.

In 1926, Rees was elected general superintendent of the merged Church, sharing the responsibility of leadership with two other men. Then in 1930, the Church reorganized itself, providing for better correlation at home and abroad. Part of the plan called for a single general superintendent, and Rees was elected to that office. He had the needed charisma to help the new arrangement work, although his physical strength was ebbing due to old age.

By September 1932, Rees was back in Pasadena, a sick man. Even in the last months of his life he kept trying to carry on the ministry which meant everything to him. On his sickbed he prayed constantly for the missionaries and dictated letters to them. On his last weekend, he whispered faintly into the ears of Paul S. Rees, his preacher-son, “I’m almost home!” He arrived “home” on Monday morning, May 22, 1933.