

NOTES FROM THE ARCHIVES

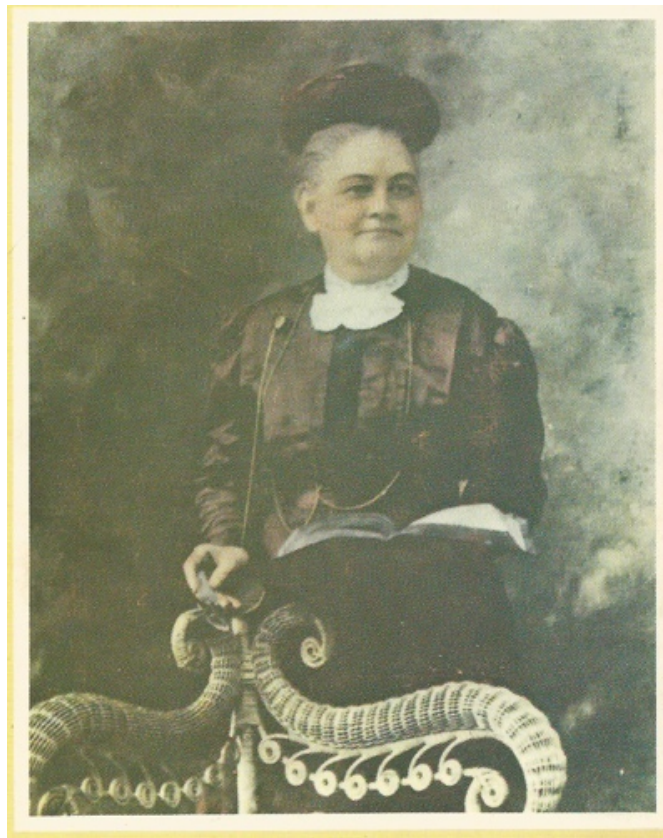
RESEARCHING THE PENTECOSTAL ASSEMBLIES OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR: A PLEA FOR VISION

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Those researching Pentecostalism in Newfoundland and Labrador must start with the life and career of Alice B. Garrigus (1858-1949). The American founder of what became known as the Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland and Labrador (PAONL) travelled to Newfoundland in December 1910 in response to what she understood to be God's call on her life. On Easter Sunday, 1911, she opened Bethesda Mission, in downtown St. John's, the capital city. She was 52 years of age.

My mother, who was one of Garrigus' many disciples, told me many stories about her unusual ministry. At 22 years of age, realizing that the founder's story had never been adequately chronicled, I determined to fill this lacuna. The sources available to me included Garrigus's testimony, serialized in the pages of the PAONL's magazine *Good Tidings*, as well as oral history accounts from those who had worked closely with her, and correspondence and personal papers of Newfoundland's Pentecostal leadership. My research and writing led to the publication of a two-volume hagiography of Garrigus, *The Lady Who Came* and *The Lady Who Stayed*, published in 1982 and 1983, respectively. Roy D. King comments, "His twin biographies of our founder established him as our historian."

Since then, I have devoted four decades to augmenting my research on Garrigus. My personal archives are now the most complete collection of documentary material on her available anywhere. I gladly and proudly share my research with other scholars who are researching topics related to her and the PAONL.



Alice B. Garrigus, founder, Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland and Labrador

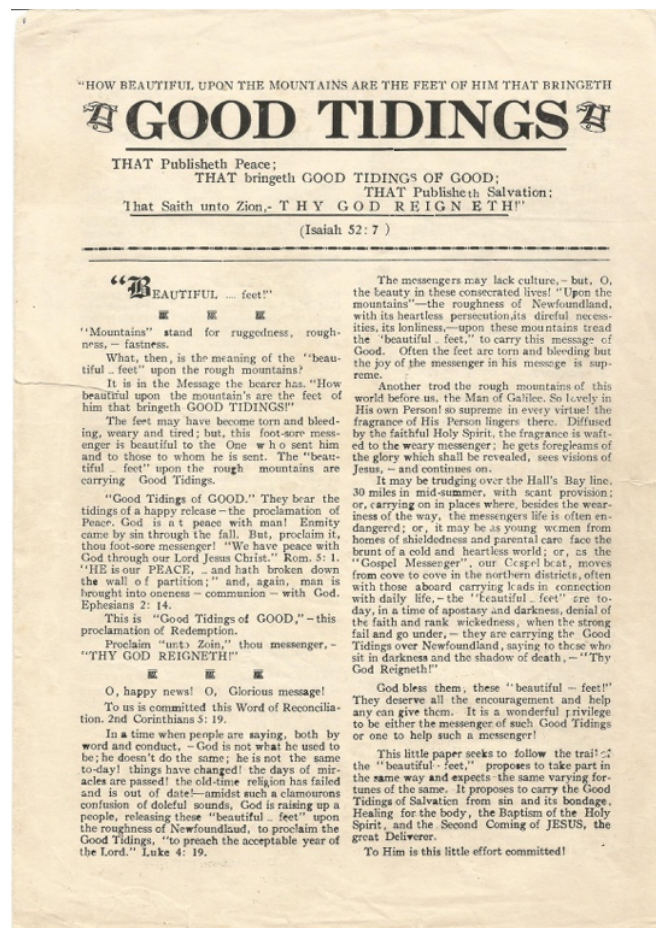
Photo Credit: Courtesy of Burton K. Janes, Personal Collection

To paraphrase the Book of Proverbs, “Where there is no vision, the archives perish.” Vision, i.e., unusual discernment or foresight, is a basic requirement for an effective archive. Eugene Vaters (1898-1984), the second General Superintendent of the PAONL (1928-62), may never have used the word “archives,” but he was a true visionary who conscientiously, if haphazardly, preserved documentary material, including publications, minutes, photographs, reports, correspondence, etc. This material was stored in banker’s boxes at the denomination’s head office, in St. John’s, first at 444 Water Street, and later, 57 Thorburn Road.



Eugene Vaters, General Superintendent, PAONL, 1928-1962
Photo Credit: Courtesy of Burton K. Janes, Personal Collection

Under Roy D. King's tenure as General Superintendent (1980-96), the idea of archives took a giant leap forward. He possessed a keen sense of history. "People are the essence of history," he maintains. I was hired to edit the official publication, *Good Tidings*, and develop a formal archive. Shelving had already been put in place; I purchased storage boxes. Over a 15-year period, I organized and stored documents, recordings, photographs and more. In addition, I regularly added to the collection. Several scholars conducted research onsite.



Premier issue of *Good Tidings* (1924), PAONL's official publication.
Photo Credit: Courtesy of Burton K. Janes, Personal Collection

While writing my officially commissioned *History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland*, which was published in 1996, I had unrestricted access to the denomination's files. The material I called upon included local church histories, minutes, correspondence, interviews, photographs, and papers, theses, and dissertations. I also relied heavily on precursors to *Good Tidings* (1924-29), most of which Eugene Vaters had a hand in producing: *The Independent Communion*, *Elim Pentecostal Evangel*, *Pentecostal Evangel*, *The Pentecostal Herald*, and *Newfoundland Pentecostal Evangel*.

From 1996 to 2013, I researched and wrote eight books in my History of Churches Series—Deer Lake, Port de Grave, Birchy Bay,

Springdale, Embree, Elim Pentecostal Tabernacle (St. John's), Fort McMurray (Alberta), and Bishop's Falls. I based these congregational histories on visits to each church for one week, where I interviewed older members and photocopied extant documentary material. I also conducted interviews with pastors who had been stationed in the churches.

Having had no effective reason to consult the archives in person in more than a decade, I recently contacted the present General Superintendent about its current status. My questions were basic, "Are the Archives still in operation? Are they still available to the general public who may be researching the PAONL? Are they still available to academics who may be writing papers, theses and dissertations on the denomination? If so, what are the 'ground rules' for visiting and researching in the Archives?" Denominational officials responded by saying that the archives are no longer available for public access. No timeline was given relative to this unfortunate development.

Dr. Hans Rollmann, Honorary Research Professor at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN), has long maintained a website, "Religion, Society and Culture in Newfoundland and Labrador" (<http://www.ucs.mun.ca/~hrollman/>). It is an indispensable text and picture repository about, not only Pentecostalism, but the other religions that make up the demography of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Garrigus' autobiography, "Walking in the King's Highway," which was originally published in *Good Tidings* (1938-42), is among the texts on this homepage.

Memorial University of Newfoundland's Centre for Newfoundland Studies (CNS) is a significant resource; I have deposited duplicate originals or copies of some key materials there. And, I have made arrangements that, upon my passing, my entire personal archive pertaining to Newfoundland and Labrador in general, and Pentecostalism in particular, will be left with the CNS, where it will be available to the public. With the PAONL archives now closed, researchers will struggle to research the denomination, delving into material hither and yon. Without a well-defined vision, the denomination's archives will continue to languish, and scholars will be left at a severe disadvantage in consulting documentary material. Hopefully this situation will be rectified in the near future because there is still a lot of work to do in the history of Pentecostalism.

Some suggestions for future projects on aspects of Newfoundland Pentecostalism that deserve more scholarly attention include the

following: First, a critical biography of Garrigus, focusing on her pre-Newfoundland career, is in order. Second, another woman of note in this history is Victoria Booth-Clibborn Demarest (1889-1982), William Booth's granddaughter. In 1919 she held a lengthy series of meetings in a St. John's Methodist Church. One source lists at least 100 individuals who were converted during or shortly after the evangelistic crusade and later joined Garrigus' then fledgling Bethesda Mission. One untapped source of information about this are the daily updates published in local newspapers. A third topic is the history of Pentecostal schools. F. David Rideout's *History of Newfoundland Schools in Newfoundland and Labrador* (1992) is the best published source on the provincial educational system. However, its relationship to government and other denominations warrants further research. A fourth idea would be a critical biography of Labrador's Pentecostal "missionary" William Gillett (1906-77). Eugene Vaters placed him "alongside Livingstone of Africa, Carey of India, Morrison of China, Gilmore of Mongolia, etc." Gillett's role as a builder of community, who focused on the spiritual, economic and educational aspects of his constituents, would make for an ideal dissertation topic. Fifth, following Confederation of the Colony of Newfoundland with the Dominion of Canada in 1949, the question of "organic union" of the PAONL with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada arose, but gained no ground. Further study of those negotiations should be undertaken. And finally, the PAONL's intersection with public life and politics has received little attention. Of special interest would be Premier J.R. Smallwood's (1900-1991) tortured relationship with religion in general and Pentecostalism in particular. His mother, a Pentecostal, attended Bethesda Mission and sat under Garrigus' ministry. In later years, Smallwood sobbed when I interviewed him, expressing his personal regret about not having followed Garrigus' teachings, convinced that he would have received a divine call to preach. Instead, he became an orator and politician of some renown.

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