

## ***Olive Branch Mission History from The Chapel at Olive Branch Mission***

The Chapel at Olive Branch Mission is relatively new, but Olive Branch Mission has deep historical heritage of Free Methodism. Our history traces back almost to the beginning of the Free Methodist Church – August 23, 1860.

Olive Branch Mission is not only the oldest rescue mission in the City of Chicago but also the oldest in the United States. Olive Branch Mission was formerly organized in 1876 as the Wells Street Mission. But the earliest beginnings of the mission date go back to 1867 when a courageous Free Methodist lady, Rachel A. Bradley, began ministering to the poorest of the poor in the city of Chicago. As a matter of fact, B. T. Roberts wrote for publication in “The Free Methodist” in December, 1879, “Four years ago (1875) the Lord laid it on the heart of Mrs. Rachel A. Bradley to open a Mission among the poor in Chicago.” (Please see “For Such a Time as This” by Rev. C. N. Schumaker.) Also, our newspaper, “The Olive Branch,” was first published in September, 1894, and it became the second oldest continuously published news publication in Chicago after the Chicago Tribune.

This time, we would like to share with you these three historical articles contributed to *The Olive Branch*:

- “The Founder of Olive Branch Mission” in *The Olive Branch (Vol 6 – No. 4, December, 1899)* by Rev. C. B. Ebey (A Former Pastor at Morgan Street Free Methodist Church)
- “Olive Branch Mission (Historical)” in *The Olive Branch (Vol 17-No. 11, July, 1911)* by Ms. Mary Everhart (the Co-Founder & the 1<sup>st</sup> Superintendent of Olive Branch Mission: 1893-1928)
- “For Such a Time as This” in *The Olive Branch (Vol. 65-No. 11, July, 1959)* by Rev. C. N. Schumaker (the 5<sup>th</sup> Superintendent of Olive Branch Mission: 1954 – 1968)

If you are interested in more details about Olive Branch Mission history, please feel free to contact me: Tomoyo Akemoto [t\\_akemoto7@hotmail.com](mailto:t_akemoto7@hotmail.com) or [takemoto@obmission.org](mailto:takemoto@obmission.org)

You could also visit our website:

**<https://www.obmission.org/historical-center>**

You might also want to read:

[Light in a Dark Place – “The Story of Chicago’s Oldest Rescue Mission”](#) by Ralph Woodworth: Light and Life Press, 1978

**“The Founder of Olive Branch Mission.” in *The Olive Branch* (Vol.6-No.4, December,1899)  
by Rev. C. E. Ebey**

During the month of June, 1873, I was permitted to attend the historic Charles camp-meeting for the first time. The people, with one single exception, were entire strangers to me. The one exception was that of the late Rev. J. G. Terrill, who was, the year previous to that time, a district chairman in the Illinois conference. He made a visit to the town in which I then resided, and preached a few times, greatly to the delight of the people. He gave me an invitation to the above meeting, which I was providentially allowed to accept. I was entertained by the good pilgrims of Chicago; and shall ever remember with pleasure the pleasant, yea, delightful week I spent in that lovely grove, amid those Spirit-baptized saints of God.

Among the friends from Chicago was a tall, queenly-looking lady, to whom I was introduced as “Mrs. Bradley.” I learned that she was there rather as a visitor, and was being labored with in order that she might be led into an experience of the deeper things of God.

On being appointed to the pastorate of the old Morgan street church in Chicago, in the fall of 1877, I found among my flock Sister Bradley. She was much changed in appearance. Her garments were no longer worldly, and the haughty look and air had been supplanted by the meek and quiet spirit. “Mrs. Bradley” was now Sister Bradley. She was, I soon found, deeply interested in the poor and needy, and was carrying on mission work among them – distributing food and clothing, and conducting a sewing-school in the church on Saturdays.

Ever and anon Sister Bradley would express a desire to open a mission, for evening services, somewhere in the wicked and neglected part of the city. I confess to not having had very great faith in the proposed mission. I feared our sister’s courage would fail and that the mission would be short-lived. Hence, our sister received discouragement from her pastor, rather than encouragement.

She felt, however, that the Lord would have her open a mission; and what the Lord prompts us, or leads us, to do, is always successful. My suggestions of possible failure, small congregations, rent unpaid, etc., etc., were unavailing; and by and by our good sister said, “I am looking for a vacant room on the North side. She found one, and the “Wells Street Mission” was opened.

Quite a number of our people attended the opening services. The room was well filled with a motley company – from floated bums to saintly-faced, heavenly-minded women. As I remember, souls sought the Lord for pardon and purity at this meeting. The dedicatory services were quite informal. A simple gospel message was delivered by the writer. Songs and testimonies followed; and the Lord himself dedicated the humble hall that had been transformed from a vile saloon into a veritable Bethel – a gateway of heaven to many precious souls.

Frequently visiting ministerial brethren would go and proclaim the precious gospel of the Son of God. I considered it a privilege to go on the Sabbath afternoons and conduct a holiness service. God honored the faith and fidelity of our dear sister. Money was provided for the rent, fuel, etc. Many poor families were fed and clothed, and scores of precious souls were born into the Kingdom.

Finally the itinerant wheel removed me from the city, so that from thenceforward I was simply an occasional visitor.

God made our sister a chosen vessel to bear the waters of salvation to the thirsty lips of the lost and fallen. Many were her trials and conflicts as she toiled on. Severer were her testings than you have ever dreamed of; yet amid that which was heart-crushing and soul-rending, she kept true to God and her work. Many will rise up at the last day and praise God for this mission, and that Rachel Bradley was ever allowed to tell them of Jesus and his love.

### **OLIVE BRANCH MISSION (Historical)** (From Vol.17-No.11, July, 1911)

Brother C. B. Ebey, of sainted memory, says of the starting of this mission work: "When I was appointed to the pastorate of old Morgan Street church, Chicago, in the fall of 1877, I found Sister R. A. Bradley one of my flock. She was deeply interested in the poor, the needy, the neglected, and was carrying on mission work among them. She had at that time a sewing school in the church Saturdays, and she also distributed both food and clothing among the most destitute, but felt led to open a mission hall in which she could hold meetings nights for the benefit of the many, many poor lost ones that wandered aimlessly up and down the streets or from saloon to saloon." Brother Ebey tried very hard to dissuade her from this purpose and to show her that nothing but failure could possibly come of such an effort; that a poor, frail woman could never control the class of people that would attend such meetings; besides, how could she meet the rent, coal, gas and other bills? But by and by, as she met him on the street one day, she greeted him with, "I am looking for a vacant hall on the North Side." She soon found one, and Wells Street Mission was opened.

God signally blessed and prospered the work and saved many precious souls, even from the first opening of the mission in that dilapidated old hall, formerly used as a saloon.

In the winter and spring of 1891, Sister Bradley was very sick and had to give up the mission into other hands; indeed, it seemed for a time that she would never again stand on the platform and plead with sinners, especially lost boys, to seek the Christ who alone could deliver them from their bondage to sin and iniquity – plead with them as only a mother with a bleeding, breaking heart over her own sin-wrecked loved ones could plead – but God in his wisdom and mercy spared her life, and she opened the mission on Desplaines street, September, 1891.

Of course the mission could no longer be called the Wells Street Mission, so a new name was looked and sought for diligently. Many and various suggestions were offered, but to each and all Sister Bradley smilingly shook her queenly head, until we wondered if the mission was indeed to be nameless (for by this time we were among the mission workers). One day, however, with much satisfaction and great decision, she said, "I like the name 'Olive Branch' better than any and all the other names;" and later, after much consultation and many prayers, this name was adopted.

During the summer of 1893 Sister Bradley was very, very sick, and it seemed evident to all that her life's work was nearly ended and that some one must be found to take charge of the mission. This seemed indeed a very difficult task, for many reasons – so difficult that no one would ever have dreamed of accepting it, only at the definite, direct command of God. But this he had given us long months before, and on August 30, 1893, Olive Branch Mission, which had been closed for a short time, was reopened by the writer and Lulu Howe.

When we think of the trials, hardships, and toil, day and night, of those years, we wonder that we lived through the first one, and we would not, could not, if the Jehovah of the Bible had not cared for us something as he cared for the children of Israel on their way to the promised land.

In the early spring of 1894, while we still lived in the one rear room of the mission and were many times compelled to meet a large part of the expenses out of our own pocket, the Lord began talking to us about starting a paper. Oh, what an inscendable mountain of difficulty seemed to surround us! and how the devil showed us our inability and sneered and scoffed at us! How many times, as we tried to pray and settle the matter, he fairly hissed in our ears, "Failure, disgrace, shame and reproach to the cause of God!" Night and day the battle raged in our inmost soul over this matter, and when we would get it about settled to obey what seemed so clearly the voice of God, another voice would ring out in derision, "Remember the devil can appear as an angel of light" – and again all would be tumult within. But we finally promised God to at least make an honest attempt to do what seemed so impossible – start the OLIVE BRANCH. We began by consulting with our Chicago friends about the matter and soon learned that they, too, thought it an utter impossibility and wholly out of the question; but even this God would not accept as an excuse. We then corresponded with some of our Pennsylvania friends, who wrote us encouragingly and gave us some excellent advice as to what to do and how to do it.

The OLIVE BRANCH made its first visit to friends and foes, September, 1894. One of these foes, upon learning of our intention to publish a paper, had written us a very, very strong letter of disapproval, making such a step seem a very grievous sin; but on receiving that first issue he repented and brought forth fruits meet for repentance, for he accompanied the letter asking forgiveness, with a five dollar bill.

Long before we were out of the billows of criticism concerning our audacity in starting the paper, the Lord began to talk to us about a Building Fund and about making a desperate effort to really establish Olive Branch Mission in Chicago. If it was wisdom and economy to build churches and parsonages, why not to build mission halls and homes for the weary workers in the home land and on the foreign fields? But the very mention of this plan for a Building Fund called forth opposition fierce and strong. Scorn and contempt, deep and bitter, greeted the very suggestion, but the Lord kept whispering continually, "This is the way, walk ye in it." In August, 1895, after weeks and months of prayer and waiting, the Building Fund was started with the money received at the Bowling Green camp meeting in charge of Rev. W. B. Olmstead. The donations came in very slowly, most of them from poor people. Many mocked us as they did the Jews in Nehemiah's time, saying, "What do these feeble" women? "Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice?" (Yes, that was one thing they really did know how to do.) And there were not wanting Tobiahs to say, "Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall." Others said, "You will never live to see a building!" But in

spite of every opposition, even our own lack of faith and courage, in less than seven years, a property was bought, and May 1, 1902, we moved into our mission home at 114 S. Peoria street. The property was not just what we wanted, but the best we had nearly enough money to buy; in fact, we had less than two thirds the cost of this property and the repairs necessary, but the God of battles helped us through.

As factories of various kinds and sporting houses crowded in all around us and the old buildings on the property became more and more dilapidated, we decided in the fall of 1910 that it was God's time for us to move where we could get better air. After weeks of searching for a property within our means, which would accommodate the mission family, now grown from two to eight, and the Olive Branch paper, we decided that the old family residence of which we gave you the picture last month was the very best we could find, considering everything. The Board purchased this property, and we took possession January 12, 1911.

From August, 1893, until June, 1894, the workers lived in the one rear room of the mission hall, in spite of the warnings and entreaties of the police to go elsewhere if we did not want to lose our lives, as we were surrounded by barrel-houses, dens of iniquity and houses of shame. From June, 1894, until the winter of 1896, we lived in three very small rooms off a dirty alley. January 2, 1896, a board of nine directors was elected, a constitution and by-laws were adopted, and Olive Branch Mission was incorporated. During this same winter the mission workers took charge of the Green Street Rescue Home and run it in connection with the mission from 1896 to 1898. From the fall of 1898 until the spring of 1899, we lived on the third floor of the mission building, or rather slept there and ate and lived in the rear room of the mission, enduring all kinds of privations. May, 1899, we moved to a flat on Monroe street and remained there until we took possession of our Peoria street property, May, 1902.

Since August 30, 1893, we have held a prayer meeting and a gospel service every night, except one or two, and a street meeting every night when the weather would permit. We have also held meetings Sunday afternoons and all day Thanksgiving and Christmas, and from one to two services on most of the other holidays.

We hold services at the Desplaines Street police station and Madison Street lodging-house Sunday meetings. And in addition to these meetings for adults, we hold our mission Sunday school every Sabbath at 2:30pm.

Through all these years, an average of more than one each day has sought the Lord. Through some have backslidden, many others are pressing on the upward way, telling the old, old story of redeeming love as they go and a number have swept through the gates into the city of unending day, there to praise God forever for the blood that washes whiter than snow and for the little lighthouse where they found salvation from sin.

The Lord has marvelously blessed and helped us all the way, and heaven has come down our souls to greet as poor lost men and women have been transformed and transfigured before our eyes.

We praise God for deigning to so use such worthless, incapable servants, and we give him the glory for all that has been accomplished.

**“FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS”** by C.N. Schumaker: (Vol.65-No.11, July, 1959)

I have before me, as I write, an article from the pen of Bishop Benjamin Titus Roberts written for publication in “The Free Methodist” in December, 1879. In it he says, “Four years ago (1875) the Lord laid it on the heart of Mrs. Rachel A. Bradley to open a Mission among the poor in Chicago.”

This Mission is still - under God’s direction and in His providence - a going concern. It is dedicated to the care and to the Salvation of God’s neglected poor. Eighty-four years have come and gone and her doors of Hope are still open and her ministry extends to men, women and children regardless of race, color or creed.

Our chief concern is that all may be saved from sin as well as the *results* of sin.

We believe that “Jesus died for our sins (transgressions), according to the Scriptures” I Cor.15:3 and that He also ‘suffered without the gate, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood.” Heb.13:15. Therefore, we preach and teach two works of grace obtainable in this Life: Justification or the New Birth through repentance and belief of the Truth and Entire Sanctification or Cleansing from the carnal nature or inbred sin likewise through the cleansing blood of Christ. Nothing less than this will meet the need of men here as elsewhere. O that men would praise the Lord for His wonderful works to the children of men!

A comprehensive and thorough children’s work was established in those early days and still continues to thrive, reaching ever-increasing numbers of underprivileged children. The ministry to unemployed, transient, depraved, sin-enslaved men coming into Chicago from the ends of the earth, still goes on in an ever-increasing effort to save the lost. A men’s Shelter has, at last, been established to aid, maintain and spiritually nurture these converts and help them to become established as useful citizens again.

I believe that you will be interested in a few questions taken at random from the files of “The Olive Branch,” which began publication in September 1894. In the October issue of that year, Rev. S. J. DeYoung writes as follows: “Olive Branch Mission is situated in a section of the city noted for drunkenness and sin. There are saloons all around it; and drunken men and women too, abound on every hand. Many of these attend the meetings held in the Mission every night. Every week some of these poor degraded creatures come to the altar and are saved from their sins through faith in our Mighty Christ. Many of them are in the city only for a short time. Others remain here and are as bright lights in the Mission.”

In this same number of the “Olive Branch,” we glean the following: “We need help in preaching. It is a wonderful help to us who must be in meeting every night, and who must, say our say, ever so often to have someone come in and preach a fifteen or twenty minute sermon, giving the Gospel in simple words from a *Spirit-Baptized heart* to the people who compose our congregations.”

In the May number in 1895 we read the following tribute to Rev. Joseph G. Terrill, General Missionary Secretary of the Free Methodist Church: “When Rev. J. G. Terrill died on April 23<sup>rd</sup> in New York City, Olive Branch Mission lost a valuable friend, an efficient helper. He gave voice, pen, and effort to this work as he had opportunity. The converts, the Sabbath School children and those in charge will not soon forget his labors for the Mission.”

From the June number of that same year 1895, we quote: “In the passing away of Bishop David S. Warner, who for sixteen years served as President of our Board of Directors, Olive Branch Mission has lost a valuable friend and advisor.”

In a later issue, we find the following comment: “Bishop and Mrs. W. A. Sellew have taken great interest in Olive Branch Mission for many years and have greatly assisted in its advancement in many ways.”

At the turn of the Century, January 1900, we copy, “Rev. J. D. Marsh, District Elder on the Chicago District, thought the work at Olive Branch Mission of enough importance to merit a quarterly meeting appointment. While the Mission has been the scene of many gracious outpourings of the Spirit, and at different times, we have had the administration of the Lord’s Supper, never until December of this year have we enjoyed a quarterly meeting.” Thus the work goes on from year to year without missing a day or night!

Another article reads – “The name, ‘*Olive Branch Mission*, even, is in harmony with its work, a branch of the Olive Tree, being a symbol of peace! And did not the Dove sent out by Noah from the Ark, return bearing an Olive leaf (a symbol of hope) a token of God’s faithfulness in fulfilling His promises. Truly, how Hope must have revived in the hearts of those within the Ark, whose faith had been so severely put to the test! Oh, how many sin-burdened souls, with not a ray of hope to light their darkened way have entered the Mission to find pardon and peace and faith in a reconciled God! And who have gone out, with hope revived and with a determination, seeking assistance from on High, to live clean lives and to work the remainder of their days for the dear Savior whom they so long slighted.”

On that great and notable day, when God’s day book shall be opened, how gracious, in letters of light, will be the record of Olive Branch Mission.

From an editorial in the March 1936 issue of the Olive Branch, we reproduce the following which no doubt will be of interest to many of our readers – “We shall greatly miss the Free Methodist Publishing House which has just recently been moved to Winona Lake, Indiana. When Mary J. Everhart first took charge of Olive Branch Mission in 1893 she depended much upon the advice and fellowship of Rev. S. K. J. Chesbro, then publishing agent, also Mrs. Mary Baker, office editor, and other valuable helpers associated with or visiting the Publishing House.

And all down through the years we have been enabled to meet here many of God's chosen ones who have encouraged and helped us in the Mission work. Doubtless, we shall miss seeing the faces of many who have hitherto been in the City on business for the King, but we hope that when possible our friends will make it a point to stop in Chicago and visit the Mission."