

**Note:** This Work has been made available by the authority of the copyright owner solely for the purpose of private study and research and may not be copied or reproduced except as permitted by the copyright laws of Canada without the written authority from the copyright owner.

Crouse, Eric R. "The 'Great Revival': Evangelical Revivalism, Methodism, and Bourgeois Order in Early Calgary." *Alberta History* 47, no. 1 (1999): 18-23.



# “THE Great Evangelical Revivalism, Meth

Below:

Group of primary teachers at Central Methodist Church in 1915. Left to right, front row - Ruth McMillan, Etta Mather, Mrs. Palmer, Mrs. Fallis, Mrs. Morton, Mrs. Marwood, Mrs. James Garden, and Ruth McBride; middle row - Frank Seymour, Edith Emery, Flossie Wilson, Gladys Broad, Mrs. Elmer Wright, Edith May, Edith Paulson, Amy Flemons, and Olive Crandell; back row - Mr. Irvine, Mrs. Albert Marshall, Minnie Howson, Parker Bradley, Mrs. Spargo, Mrs. Kalbfleish, and Mrs. Jamieson.



▼  
By  
**Eric Crouse**

Large crowds of Calgarians assembled to hear the American evangelists H.L. Gale and J.W. Hatch preach an evangelical message during the revival campaign of March 1908. Describing one meeting, the *Daily Herald* declared that “the evangelists seem to have a grip on the city such as no religious workers have had before.” The Central Methodist Church, the largest auditorium in

Calgary excluding the rinks, was packed for the evening meetings until the close of “the great revival.”<sup>1</sup> The evangelistic services were very popular in a city that was growing in population and prominence at an impressive rate. But who invited the American evangelists? What was the message that attracted the interest of large crowds? And what can the revival meetings in general reveal about the state of Methodism in early twentieth-century Calgary?

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the promotion of evangelicalism in some western Canadian urban centres was bolstered by the visits of famous American and central Canadian evangelists. The most influential turn-of-the-century Canadian evangelistic team was the Rev. Thomas Crossley and the Rev. John Edwin Hunter, Methodists who held meetings in prairie cities as early as the late 1880s. Well-known American J. Wilbur Chapman and his associate evangelists visited Winnipeg in 1907 and reportedly attracted between 4,000 and 5,000 people every night or about 80,000 over three weeks.<sup>2</sup> Much of the incentive to invite popular evangelists to western cities was the belief that such well-known religious personalities could revitalize professed Christians and reach out to the large number of unchurched in the growing urban centres.<sup>3</sup>

Like other western Canadian cities at the turn-of-the-century period, Calgary experienced revival campaigns. In 1904

# “The Revival”

## Methodism, & Bourgeois Order in Early Calgary

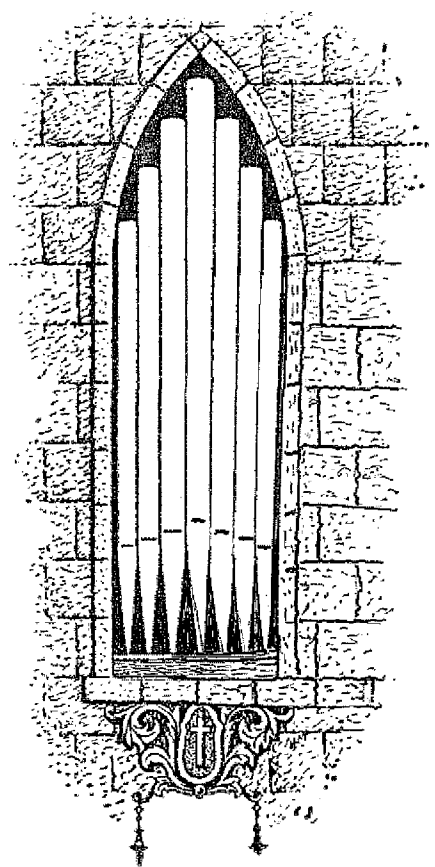
the Rev. George W. Kerby, who was installed as pastor of Central Methodist the year before, preached to more than 1,500 persons in an open air rally in Calgary.<sup>4</sup> In 1908, Central Methodist Church sought to bring the highly touted J. Wilbur Chapman to their city of approximately 30,000. However, when the Rev. Kerby, and lay leaders A.B. Cushing, Dr. T.H. Crawford, Dr. A.M. Scott, Joseph Cobblestick, J.A. Irvine and others received word in January 1908 that Chapman was unable to visit Calgary for at least another year, they decided to invite lesser-known evangelist H.L. Gale for evangelistic meetings to take place in March.<sup>5</sup> One stipulation made by Gale was that the meetings were supported by a number of churches and, thus, designated as “Union evangelistic services.” Although four Methodist and four Baptist churches shared the estimated \$650 of expenses, Central Methodist was the primary church involved in the campaign. The chairman of the management committee, for example, was W.G. Hunt, a leading member of Central Methodist.<sup>6</sup> The prominent Methodist church was also the site for the majority of the meetings.

Built in 1905 for \$65,000, Central Methodist Church appeared to symbolize the trappings of respectability and status. The sanctuary, for example, was panelled in antique oak and walnut and according to the *Daily Herald*, there were no churches in Canada that “were more complete and handsome.” Even the

Rev. George Kerby of Central Methodist had close connections with well-known capitalists, including the Eaton family in Toronto. Members of the church also included a large number representing a Calgary elite such as: R.B. Bennett, lawyer and future prime minister, and successful entrepreneurs Walter Jarret and W.H. Cushing, to name only a few.<sup>7</sup>

A New York businessman before becoming an evangelist, Gale arrived in Alberta accompanied by his assistant the Rev. J.W. Hatch.<sup>8</sup> The Gale-Hatch Calgary revival services were well-planned and orderly meetings. In addition to other meetings, there were services every afternoon at 4 o’clock in the First Baptist Church and every evening in the Central Methodist Church, which were the most popular. Although most meetings were open to both men and women, several services were designated for women or men only. Concerned with the lack of men involved in church life, the clergy took special attention to attract men to meetings at the large Central Methodist Church.

For a typical meeting, there were ushers ready to see that the large crowd of attenders were properly seated. There was also an organist and a choir, composed of local singers, prepared to sing gospel favourites.<sup>9</sup> Both congregational and solo singing highlighted the beginning of the services; occasionally Gale and Hatch sang a duet, a feature that received the



praise of many. After the first segment of gospel singing was completed, there was a prayer by one of the Calgarian ministers present. Gale then read a text from the Bible upon which his lesson sermon was based. At the conclusion of his message, he usually invited interested attenders to remain after the meeting to sign cards stating their decision to follow Christ as their Saviour.<sup>10</sup>

Describing Gale in positive terms, the *Herald* reported that he possessed a clear, penetrating voice which easily captured the attention of his revival listeners. "A man in every sense of the word," he was noted for his ability to speak in a forceful manner with the "sense of a business man" or "a lawyer urging his case." Such descriptions by the *Herald* constructed the image of a manly businessman-evangelist who would be comfortable in the much vaunted world of business. Indeed, the Calgary daily reported that Gale was personally acquainted with a large number of business people in the United States.<sup>11</sup> There was a blending of the secular world of business with evangelicalism, a combination that was not viewed as incongruous by Calgary press, church, and business leaders of this era.

Gale's revival message was evangelical in a broad sense of the word – through Christ one could be redeemed from sin. The importance of understanding the saving knowledge of Christ – to be "born again" – was a theme woven through most sermons. In one sermon, Gale did speak out against card-playing, dancing, and other amusement activities, but, as a revivalist, he usually offered a message of sin and salvation in a manner that rarely offended the sensibilities of his Calgary listeners. The atonement, Gale explained, was not about appeasing an angry God but instead illustrated "a God of infinite love." Gale avoided preaching a fire and brimstone message more commonly heard in the nineteenth century. To Calgary revival attenders, he denied that hell was a place of literal fire

but rather a place of "absolute degradation" and "no hope." While he did warn his listeners of "the possibility of eternal night for a lost soul," his message was toned-down and suited for refined tastes. On at least one occasion, Gale raised the emotions of his audience and yet refrained from asking individuals to make a decision for Christ.<sup>12</sup>

During the revival campaign, when decisions were made in Central Methodist Church they bore scant resemblance to the conversion experiences that occurred in an earlier period or that might have taken place in evangelical churches which were less concerned about maintaining "respectability," as was the case in Salvation Army circles, for example. Gale presented an evangelical message but his meetings upheld proper order and rarely generated intense emotionalism.<sup>13</sup>

If newspaper accounts are accurate, the meetings were well-received by a surprisingly large number. *The Herald* even claimed that nothing else could compete with the revival campaign throughout the city for Calgarians' interest.<sup>14</sup> One account of a meeting for men reported that

the great crowd came out of church once more to go their separate ways: upon the great ocean of life inspired for the time being at any rate by the words of an evangelist who is well worth hearing and whose fine presence and manly words will linger long in the minds of those privileged to hear him.<sup>15</sup>

About another meeting, the *Herald* wrote:

[T]he city is becoming thoroughly aroused in this great evangelistic effort. Men not frequenters of churches are now being seen in the audience. Many are being drawn by the strong and sane presentation of the familiar gospel by Evangelist Gale.<sup>16</sup> A special feature of one meeting was

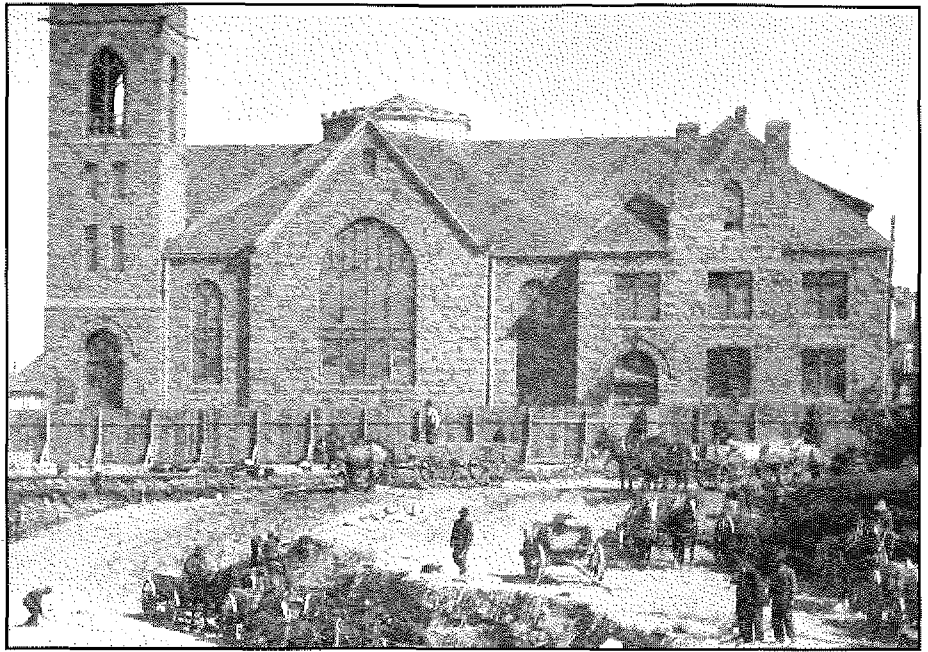
Gale's invitation that individuals rise and repeat the words: "I have accepted Christ as my Saviour." The result was that "in a continuous stream, the people rose in hundreds and said the great sentence in audible voice."<sup>17</sup>

Conversion numbers of the campaign varied. At one meeting, fifty-six individuals handed in cards that indicated their interest in spiritual matters and for another service approximately thirty indicated their desire to accept Christ as their Saviour. Although Gale declined to ask his listeners to make a decision at some services, near the conclusion of the campaign there were reportedly as many as two hundred "genuine converts."<sup>18</sup> Judging from church membership numbers, for the two churches where most of the meetings were held, the impact of the revival on Calgary was modest. The church memberships were as follows:

Central Methodist — 1906 (732), 1907 (1,058), 1908 (1,220), 1909 (1,235), and 1910 (1,255).

First Baptist — 1906 (402), 1907 (417), 1908 (470), 1909 (480), and 1910 (484).<sup>19</sup>

For Central Methodist, the rise of membership from 1906 to 1907 was 326. Within the year of the "great" Calgary revival, the membership only rose 162 and the gains in the immediate years after the revival were hardly significant. For First Baptist, the rise of membership was fairly significant. There were 53 added to the membership during 1908 (much more than the previous year), although the numbers did level off, as was the case for Central Methodist, in the two years after the revival. One of the main purposes of a revival campaign was to reach out to the increasing number of unchurched in urban centres.<sup>20</sup> But in the early twentieth century, when Calgary's population was growing rapidly, the Gale-Hatch meetings did not appear to generate a large increase in church



membership.

Because of the scarcity of sources, it is difficult to know for certain who entered the church to hear the message. Newspaper reports neither reveal much about whom attended nor say much about the class composition of the crowds. In attempting to surmise who might have taken the effort to attend the meetings, it may be significant that the large and ornate Central Methodist exemplified respectability.

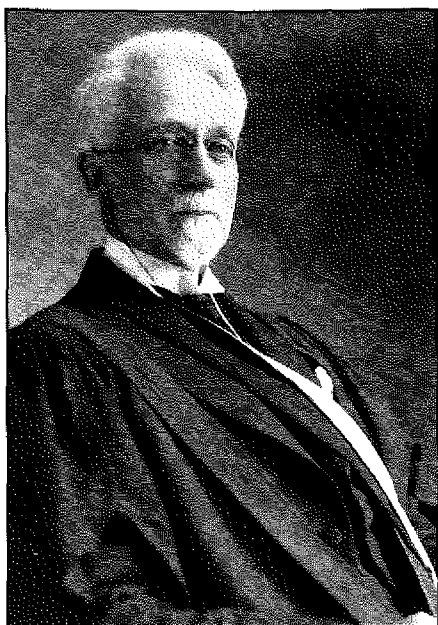
A common occurrence at the meetings, for example, was that many women wore large hats and fancy clothing, attire that reflected bourgeois tastes.<sup>21</sup> It is known that Calgary's population at the time was overwhelmingly male (especially young and single), many of whom probably spent less time in churches than in the numerous bars and pool rooms which were associated with the rough culture of masculine working-class life. A recent study of early working-class Calgary acknowledges there was genuine worker interest in the "Good Book," but there may also have been an element of "bourgeois hegemony" in some Calgary churches.<sup>22</sup> Overall, while the *Herald* reported that there were revival converts "of every

**Left:**

*Article in the Calgary Albertan, March 19, 1908.*

**Above:**

*This is a view of Central Methodist Church in 1911. The teams in the foreground are working at the site of the new Hudson's Bay Company store. The church is still in existence on the south-east corner of Seventh Avenue and First Street S.W.*



**Above:**

*The Rev. Dr. George W. Kerby was one of the leading figures in organizing the revival of 1908.*

**Right:**

*Article in the Calgary Herald, March 25, 1908.*

class of society," a significant number of workers may have experienced discomfort in the ostentatious setting of the Central Methodist Church.<sup>23</sup>

The press coverage of the 1908 campaign fails to offer insight on the class composition of revival attenders. However, Methodist cottage prayer meetings held within a year of the conclusion of the meetings do shed some light on the class structure of Calgary Methodism. One year after the departure of Gale and Hatch, six Calgary Methodist clergymen representing several city Methodist churches commenced an evangelistic campaign.<sup>24</sup> In connection with the revival there were cottage prayer services held in the residences of a number of Methodists, the overwhelming majority of whom were members of the Central Methodist Church. Of the individuals who offered meetings at their homes and whose occupations can be identified, individuals representing the working-class were by far the minority. The following is a list of the occupations and names which could be cross-matched, of those involved in the cottage meetings.

A.W. Baker (dry goods clerk), John E. Bull (district manager, Bell Telephone Co.), Rev. Thomas Buchanan (superintendent of Methodist missions), Thomas W. Campion (contractor), Joseph Cobblestick (proprietor), W.G. Collins (superintendent), Hon. William H. Cushing (president of Cushing Bros. Co. Ltd.), Alva J. Corrigan (real estate), George F. Granger (tailor), William Graves (carpenter), Walter Jarret (Jarret Bros.), Lewis Martin (carpenter), Fred G. Marwood (real estate), Mrs. McBride (A. McBride & Co.), Arthur McLatchie (clerk), Rev. R. Pearson (pastor), David Shouldice (broker), James W. Shelly (Shelly's Bake Ovens), Arthur Watts (foreman), Frederick Watson (builder), and Tobias Whittle (CPR porter).<sup>25</sup>

The majority of those who held cottage meetings were merchants, professionals, small employers, agents, and clerks. Representing the working class were

three skilled workers (two carpenters and one tailor) and one porter. Although only a small sample, the leaders of the cottage meetings do symbolize the pervasiveness of a type of respectability and upward mobility which had become increasingly accepted in mainstream Methodist circles.

Of course, there were likely working-class Methodists who attended the meetings held in the homes of merchants and employers. Indeed, class division among Methodists in these years was less pronounced in Calgary than was the case in larger Canadian cities which experienced more signs and incidents of class struggle.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, the 1909 prayer meetings, in addition to the Gale-Hatch campaign of 1908, indicate that the disposition of early twentieth-century Calgary Methodism reflected bourgeois ideals and order.

The state of Methodism in early twentieth-century Calgary represented a piety intertwined with notions of respectability and progress. This can be seen in two notable events that transpired in early March 1908: the inauguration of the Gale-Hatch revival meetings and the opening of the Cushing Brothers lumber mill. The Rev. George Kerby, pastor of Central Methodist Church, was, of course, front and centre at the revival campaign. But he also played a key role among the three hundred in attendance for the formal opening of Cushing's new factory — described by the *Herald* as "The Largest and Best in All Canada."<sup>27</sup>

This close relationship between a Methodist clergyman and a prominent capitalist symbolizes the bourgeois nature of the major Methodist church in early Calgary. Such a relationship may have been one of the more important reasons why the Gale and Hatch revival meetings did not result in a larger number of unchurched becoming church members. The Gale-Hatch campaign attracted large crowds, including "men not frequenters of churches," but until more data can be uncovered on revival

converts one must appreciate that the Gale-Hatch meetings in Calgary were perhaps not "great" enough to entice many of the unchurched into the membership of a church that promoted strong alliances between clergy and wealthy business leaders.

Dr. Crouse is an historical researcher and writer in Fredericton, N.B.

#### NOTES

- 1 "Calgary Is Better Than U.S. Cities," *Daily Herald*, March 24, 1908; "The Close Of The Great Revival," *Daily Herald*, March 25, 1908.
- 2 For more on Crossley and Hunter see David Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 89-98. The Winnipeg revival is discussed in my thesis "American Revivalists, the Press, and Popular Religion in Canada, 1884-1914" (Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1996), 195-201.
- 3 On the three main characteristics of revival see Edith Blumhofer and Randall Balmer, eds., *Modern Christian Revivals* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), xii. Some definitions of evangelicalism are as follows: "a reliance on the Bible as ultimate authority," "a stress on the New Birth," "an energetic, individualistic approach to religious duties and social involvement," and "a focus on Christ's redeeming work as the heart of essential Christianity." See Mark Nolls et al. eds. *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond 1700-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6.
- 4 I would like thank one of the anonymous referees for bringing to my attention Kerby's 1904 open air rally. In his 1912 booklet entitled "Milestones in Methodism: Calgary and Canada," Kerby states he was pastor at Central Methodist from 1903 to 1911, before accepting the principalship of Mount Royal College. The complete text of the booklet is printed in *They Gathered at the River* (Calgary: Central United Church, 1975), 33-37.
- 5 Glenbow Archives, Calgary: Central Methodist Church Papers, box 1, file 3 - Special Meeting, Jan. 5, 1908.
- 6 "Evangelistic Services Have Commenced," *Daily Herald*, March 2, 1908.
- 7 Quoted in W.J. Colett, *United Church in Calgary: Activities and Events, 1875-1970* (Calgary: Century Calgary Publications, 1975), 15, 22. *They Gathered at the River*, 87-98.
- 8 For a brief biography of the Boston-born Gale see, "Evangelistic Services Have Commenced," *Daily Herald*, March 2, 1908.
- 9 For more on the dynamics of a Canadian revival meeting see, Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith*, 86-94. For a review of recent scholarship see James W. Opp, "Revivals and Religion: Recent Work on the History of Protestantism in Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2 (été 1997 Summer), 183-94.
- 10 "Evangelistic Services are Very Popular," *Daily Herald*, March 7, 1908.
- 11 "Evangelistic Services Have Commenced," *Daily Herald*, March 2, 1908.
- 12 "You Must be Born Again," *Daily Herald*, March 13, 1908; "A Christian's Amusements," *Daily Herald*, March 21, 1908; "Much Interest Evidenced in the Bible," *Daily Herald*, March 12, 1908; "Strong Sermon by Mr. Gale Last Night," *Daily Herald*, March 11, 1908.
- 13 G.A. Rawlyk, *The Canada Fire: Radical Evangelicalism in British North America, 1775-1812* (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), xvi; Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 213; Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 164-65. Also see, Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith*, 94.
- 14 "Much Interest Evidenced in the Bible," *Daily Herald*, March 12, 1908.
- 15 "A Great Gathering Last Night," *Daily Herald*, March 9, 1908.
- 16 "Strong Sermon by Mr. Gale Last Night," *Daily Herald*, March 11, 1908.
- 17 "Converts All Out," *Daily Herald*, March 20, 1908.
- 18 "Evangelistic Services Are Very Popular," *Daily Herald*, March 7, 1908; "You Must Be Born Again," *Daily Herald*, March 13, 1908; "Convert All Out," *Daily Herald*, March 20, 1908.
- 19 United Church Archives, Toronto. *Methodist Minutes, 1906-1910*; *One Hundredth Milestone: The Story of First Baptist Church, Calgary, Alberta, 1888-1988*, 14.
- 20 Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith*, 73.
- 21 "Innovation Introduces At Revival," *Daily Herald*, March 16, 1908.
- 22 David Crawford, *Blue Flame in the Foothills: Presbyterian Activities in the Calgary Region* (Calgary: Century Calgary Publications, 1975), 62; David Bright, "Class Dismissed?: A Social History of the Calgary Labour Movement, 1883-1929" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Calgary, 1995), 123-24.
- 23 "Converts All Out," *Daily Herald*, March 20, 1908. For more on class and Protestantism see, Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, and Norman Knowles, "Christ in the Crownsnest: Religion and the Working Class on the Western Canadian Coal Mining Frontier (A paper presented to the BC Studies Conference, Malaspina University College, May 1997).
- 24 "Conducting the Methodist Revival," *Daily Herald*, March 25, 1909.
- 25 Glenbow Museum, Calgary. Henderson's Calgary Directories, 1906, 1908, and 1910; *Daily Herald*, March 26, 1909. Some names could not be cross-matched with accuracy and some lacked occupation status.
- 26 Revivalism and class conflict are discussed in my "Revivalism for the Working Class? American Methodist Evangelists in Late Nineteenth-Century Urban Ontario," forthcoming in *Ontario History*.
- 27 "The Largest and Best in All Canada," *Daily Herald*, March 3, 1908.