

HALPENNY, WESLEY TUCKER (1867-1945)

HALPENNY, Wesley Tucker, teacher, school director (v1880- v1894) peddler and Methodist minister (1903-1912 and 1915-1925), superintendent of religious book peddling (colportage) (1912-1915), pastor of the United Church (1925-1939) , born in Trowbridge (Perth County), Ontario, on November 19, 1867, died in Montreal on January 31, 1945. He married Margaret Campbell on September 14, 1903. Buried at Mount Royal Cemetery



Wesley Tucker Halpenny was born to a Methodist family on November 19, 1867 in Trowbridge (Elma Township, Perth County), Ontario. He was the son of Richard Halpenny¹ and Elizabeth Boyd², the fourth in a family of nine children. He was baptized in the town of his birth a few months later on August 19, 1868. The other children were born in Ontario as well, the eighth being Frederick in 1877. The last was born six years later in December 1883 in Neepawa, Manitoba. As we find the family in the 1881 Census of Manitoba, it is therefore between 1877 and 1881 that they moved to Neepawa, an Aboriginal territory, 185 Kilometers north of Winnipeg. The Halpennies were among the first white families to settle in the area.

After completing high school, Wesley decided to become a teacher. In Winnipeg, he attended the École normale. His diploma in hand, he served at some public schools in the province, probably between 1888 and 1894. Having decided to continue his studies, he entered Wesley College, affiliated with the University of Manitoba, where he graduated from the University in 1897. Upon leaving the University, the Methodist Synod entrusted him with the pastorate of the Church of Gilbert Plains, Manitoba, where he served until 1900.

Having learned from the Methodist newspapers that the Inner Missions Committee of this Church was calling for volunteers for the work of French evangelization in the Province of Quebec, Wesley Halpenny wanted to devote himself to this task, reorienting his career accordingly. He began by completing his training for the ministry. He enrolled for a year in theology at Victoria College at the University of Toronto. In 1901, he studied in Winnipeg at the University of Manitoba and graduated. Then, realizing that his preparation would be more effective if he was on the site of his future field of work, Halpenny came to Montreal and entered the Wesleyan College of that city, attached to McGill University. He became a Bachelor of Theology (B.D.) in 1903 and was ordained the same year.

While studying there, he was taking a French language course at the Westmount Methodist Institute. His ardor, his tenacity, his desire to learn enabled him to possess enough language so that, when he left university, he could accept the pastorate of the French Methodist Church on Delisle Street (very close to Atwater street, still called West Church, in Pointe-Saint-Charles), succeeding Pastor Édouard DE GRUCHY who had set up and built his church

¹ Born October 18, 1835 in Gloucester (Carleton) in Ontario and died October 3, 1904 in Ottawa.

² Born March 18, 1839 in Ontario and died August 14, 1901 in Neepawa, Manitoba.

(1899). Its community had about fifty members but was enriched by the attendance of the hundred students and teachers of the French Methodist Institute who lived nearby. Next to the church was the presbytery and the day school of the French West Mission.

As soon as he arrived, Halpenny was particularly active, combining the roles of book peddler and pastor. He demonstrated innovation using a magic lantern during his sermons. He had a strong belief in the door-to-door formula and stepped up the pace of his home visits. In 1904, he opened an employment office to find work for the unemployed, himself in this working-class district. He pushed further for a few months in 1908, organizing evening classes for adults. According to historian Vogt-Raguy, "For a contribution of 25 cents a month, twenty young people attended, on Tuesday and Thursdays, to get a general education. A Bible reading session was being progressively added to the program on Fridays. But the experience did not last. He would continue his work in this area for nine years until 1912.

His first pastoral commitment was also marked by his marriage to Margaret Ann Campbell (born in Quebec City on April 22, 1864) where he had traveled for the ceremony which took place on September 16, 1903. Like him, she had an excellent knowledge of French and would support him for the rest of his career. They would have a son Merle Godfrey (sometimes Merle B.) born in July 1905 according to the 1911 census.³

While attending to his family and flock, he attended McGill University and obtained a Master of Arts degree in French in 1911. It was to continue in this way that he obtained a leave during the year 1912 to go to Paris to take some courses at the Sorbonne and the College of France obtaining a special certificate of studies from each of these two institutions. As he became superintendent of book peddling in 1912, as we shall see, we do not know how he kept his two fields of work together in that year.

The phenomenal growth of Western Canada, which more than doubled between 1896 and 1916, led the churches to focus their energies on the fact that the fight against a Catholic Church in Quebec was much less profitable. All the churches then reorganized their missionary activities in a 'Canadian' setting that struggled to meet the specificities of the Francophone province. Presbyterians were ready to abandon their book peddling activities as early as 1909, the Anglicans closed their colleges in 1911 and relied on their parishes as a means of evangelization, the Methodists no longer had book peddlers, and their evangelizing action in French in Montreal was reduced to the only Methodist Institute in Westmount, but they were still developing a popular urban evangelizing approach in the city center that would later be attended by Wesley Halpenny.

The latter has a very negative view of such an evolution, he who still firmly believes that itinerant book sellers, however modest they were, were able to enter areas inaccessible to ordinary missionaries. As the Quebec Bible Society, both for Montreal and Quebec City, wanted to continue distributing Bibles, Halpenny agreed early in 1912 to serve and became Superintendent of book peddlers. Its task consisted in coordinating all the evangelization actions of this type carried out with linguistic and religious communities living in Quebec. If the Society was proud of its new dynamism and distributed more Bibles than ever before, the

³ His name Merle recalls the historian of the Reformation, Merle d'Aubigny. He studied science at McGill University and graduated in 1926. He married Laurette AG Lemoine of Melbourne, QC, on August 24, 1929, and as early as 1930, he was known to work for Dominion Bridge Co. lives in Lachine and continues to be engaged by this company as a graduate engineer until at least 1956. After, we lose track.

person concerned would soon see the limits of this way of doing things. Some like him saw that the Society was limited to the sale of the Holy Scriptures while they lost approach strengthened by the distribution of publications, leaflets that accompanied these sales and gave the opportunity to explain the principles at the same time. He would leave his post in 1915 but, in recognition, will be named a life member of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

Let's go back a bit. In 1909, the Methodist Committee, wishing to take care of the evangelization of the people and the inhabitants having moved strongly towards the east of the city of Montreal, it was decided to sell the church of the rue Craig, acquired in 1878 and who wore since the name of First French Methodist Church. In 1910, land was acquired at the corner of Ontario and St. Andrew Streets. Before a conference room could be built with items that could be used by the pastor in charge of the mission, the venues were used to draw public attention to Methodists and Biblical values. Edouard DE GRUCHY, Wesley Halpenny and Paul VILLARD settled there to preach in the open air. The preachers or their assistants would get hit with rotten fruit or stones in this neighborhood which was not yet sensitive to the right of speech or divergent messages. Nevertheless, they continued to hold assemblies for as long as the season permitted. The construction was completed in 1911 and inaugurated on March 10, 1912. Pastor DELPORTE, who was responsible for the Craig Street Church at the time of the change of location, continued to take care of the community that had followed him. then Pastor MASSICOTTE took over for a year only.

Leaving his superintendent's post in 1915, Halpenny became pastor of this First Methodist Church and remained so until 1924. One can imagine that he also continued actively to meet the needs of this new neighborhood and try to reach people. Upon arrival, the parish has 20 families, which number will grow to 47 in 1923.

As early as 1912, the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches voted for their merger in a United Church of Canada. The war and the refusal of the Presbyterian minority to rally had delayed the constitution of the new Church, which was becoming imminent. In 1924, two Montreal communities decided to pre-date this deadline. The First Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church of the Savior began talks in March, and by Easter Day, April 20, the union was formalized. The new church still bore the name of the Savior and it was established rue de la Roche (near Lafontaine Park). She succeeded by her contributions to pay almost entirely the salary of the pastor, which was not the case before. At the time of the creation of the United Church in 1925, she became a member of the Consistory of Montreal and attached to the Synod Montreal and Ottawa.

Halpenny would continue to assume spiritual direction for nearly fifteen years. He was active there and his community grew. There were 56 families and 20 additional individuals for a total of 215 people, 272 three years later, then his church gradually decreases to 209 people by the time he left in 1939, although the number of families (91) has almost doubled since the time of its inclusion in the new Canadian Church, in addition to the individuals attached to it. Full members increased from 110 to 142 by the end of 1938. This was a parish that was growing well even in the midst of the Great Depression.

In the early years, there was an association of young people (20 members), one of the missionary ladies (27 members) and an association of ladies patronesses (17 members). Only the association of young people disappears in the 1930s, the other two remaining essential to

the life of the parish. This community did not manage to pay the full salary of the pastor, but with the help of the patronesses, it managed to pay at least two-thirds, except in the worst of the crisis when it is more like a third. The small historical clues gleaned here and there only confirm that the pastor led his community flexibly and that everyone was involved. He would continue to deal with the congregation until December 31, 1939, when he retired because of sickness. He was 72 years old at the time.

In 1936 he had been president of the Alumni Association of the Pointe-aux-Trembles Institute. He lost his wife on March 18, 1943 and would be buried at Mount Royal Cemetery where he will join her on January 31, 1945. His funeral was be presided over by Pastor Henri Joliat of Saint John's United Church in Montreal.

Wesley T. Halpenny was the author of several pamphlets on the missionary work of the Methodist Church in the Province of Quebec, but we have not been able to find copies or consult them. He also published several temperance treatises and worked diligently with various Methodist newspapers, the *Christian Guardian* (in April 1907, for example), *Missionary Outlook*, and *Acta Victoriana*, a newsletter of Victoria University in Toronto.

The Society of the History of French Protestantism in Canada paid tribute to it (May 5, 1939 in *L'Aurore*: "The Evangelical Ministry of Mr. W. T. Halpenny was fruitful and blessed. Endowed with a firm and tenacious determination, of a persevering and determined nature, W. Halpenny knew how to overcome the obstacles and the difficulties. His affability, kindness, frankness, and even humor have always earned him the esteem and affection of all who have worked with him in the Master's work. (SHPF, May 5, 1939). In his obituary, The United Church of Canada added, "He was a faithful and devoted pastor, a warm brother to his colleagues, and all who knew him stood in high esteem."

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English version by Jason Zuidema

Sources

Special thanks ot Barbara Page for some hints into Manitoban beginnings of the family..

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