

ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS, IV: HENRY KENDALL

by Tom Cox

Henry Kendall: We know the name; after all we have a room named in his honor *and* our church belongs to Kendall Presbytery, but most of us know little of the man. By any measure, he was a giant of the faith.

Kendall, general secretary of the New School Presbyterian Church Board of Domestic Missions, stopped in Salt Lake City in 1864 en route to the Pacific Coast. After his 600-mile day and night ride from Denver on the Overland Stage, he was ready for a break. The forty-nine-year-old Presbyterian spent a week in Salt Lake, and while there met with Brigham Young, who when asked said he had no objections to the establishment of Protestant churches in Utah — or, Young added, "to the sending of missionaries to the Mormons either, if you like." Young even invited Kendall to speak on Sunday in the Tabernacle, for he said he wanted his people to know what other denominations believed; Kendall accepted and, he reported, preached to "a large, respectful, and attentive audience."

Young must soon have regretted his openhandedness, for the first Protestant missionary to Utah, Norman McLeod, a Presbyterian sent out in 1865 by the interdenominational American Home Missionary Society, turned out to be a vitriolic opponent of Mormonism, scathing and unrelenting in his attacks. Polygamy, in particular, drew McLeod's wrath; it was, he said, "a doctrine for the dark, fierce, remorseless, far-sweeping purpose of humiliation and crushing-out of hope and utter ruin to woman and through woman to her children, that would do credit to the archfiend and enemy of mankind." Young had certainly not anticipated missionaries of this stripe. Hostility rose, and while McLeod was in the east raising funds, his Sunday School superintendent was murdered. McLeod was warned not to return. For the moment Protestant missionary work in Utah was at an end.

But Kendall had not forgotten what he had seen there, nor the invitation he had received from Young. In 1870, when the Old School and New School Presbyterian churches reunited, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (as it was now called) picked Kendall to coordinate its home missionary activity. In this capacity, Kendall enthusiastically pushed for missions to Mormon country and won considerable financial support for them in denominational councils. With Kendall working in the East and Sheldon Jackson in the West — in 1871 Jackson sent Rev. J. W. Welch to begin work in Salt Lake City — missionary effort in Utah and neighboring areas burgeoned. Thus began Presbyterian activity in our area — and though he was not often in the limelight, over the next several decades Kendall was never far off stage. As one historian wrote, Kendall "oversaw the distribution of 13 million Presbyterian dollars, [but] his chief monuments were intangible. They lay in the `sustained and viable character of the western settlers' reached by his efforts.

In 1877 the Presbytery of Utah petitioned the General Assembly to have financial support from church funds directed to educational home missions, just as it was to foreign ones, and to commission women for this service. Henry Kendall was among the proposal's strongest supporters and spoke eloquently in its behalf. The upshot was that the Board of Home Missions

received authorization to commission teachers to serve Hispanics in New Mexico, Mormons in Utah, and native Americans in Alaska (an authorization that was subsequently broadened to include other native Americans). On July 1, 1877, Mary Coyner, wife of the head of the Presbyterian Collegiate Institute in Salt Lake City (forerunner of Westminster College), received the first commission. Efforts quickly followed to organize women to support the educational missions financially, and the Women's Executive Committee (later called the Woman's Board of Home Missions) emerged to fill the role. It was from these roots that the work of Amelia Frost on the Fort Hall Reservation would spring a decade later.

Nor did Kendall's influence on our area end there. In 1883 he persuaded the Rev. Samuel E. Wishard to give up his position as pastor of Chicago's Fifth Presbyterian Church to take charge of home mission activity in the Synod of Kentucky. Wishard brought long experience in the pulpit to his new position and found quick success among a people who took their religion more seriously than the northerners with whom he had worked previously. Recognizing Wishard's talent, Kendall "borrowed" him from the Synod of Kentucky and sent him for three months to assist in Utah and Idaho. This short stint over, Wishard went back to pastoral work in 1887, but in 1890 Kendall persuaded him to go west to serve as missionary for the Synod of Utah once more. This time Wishard stayed. Over the next fifteen years he was to be a major contributor in making Presbyterianism a vital force throughout Utah and Idaho — but that only happened because Kendall had persuaded his reluctant colleague to take up the challenge.

A fellow Presbyterian later described Kendall as "one of the greatest Presbyterian Missionary-statesmen . . . intelligent, broad-minded, earnest, efficient, and an unselfish advocate of the Mission of the Church." Kendall died in 1892; Kendall Presbytery was named after him in 1893. A Memorial Minute, adopted by the Board of National Missions, read in part: "His views were broad and far-reaching, but his spirit was always kindly, even toward those who differed from him." This spirit may well have been what had disarmed Brigham Young and led him, through Kendall, to invite Protestant churches and missionaries to Utah. The memorial minute went on: "It is no wonder that the Synod of Idaho felt honored in preserving the memory of this great Presbyterian leader by giving his name to the Presbytery of Kendall" which served an area much influenced by his efforts.

But the mission board was mistaken on one account: it was the Synod of Utah, not the Synod of Idaho that honored Kendall's memory by naming a presbytery after him. When the Synod of Utah met in Pocatello in 1905 it consisted of three presbyteries: the Presbytery of Utah and two in Idaho, of which Kendall Presbytery (to which the Pocatello church belonged from its beginning) was one.

The memory of all Kendall had done not only led the national mission board to adopt its memorial minute and the synod to name a presbytery after him, but also later inspired the leaders of First Presbyterian Church in Pocatello to name a room in his honor. Everything considered, it was a most appropriate action.