

The Vintage Voice

Serving The Church Pension Fund's Family of Beneficiaries

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Remembering Scotland

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My journey to Scotland began when I left Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where I had studied for 1½ years, after having served ten months as chaplain with the Marines in China during World War II. My ten months in China were spent first in Tientsin, where I met several locals who were friendly and had spent time in the U.S.; we were then stationed near the Great Wall for a few months. Returning to seminary, I was undecided about re-entering parish ministry. Since I had missed Scottish Professor John Baillie's brief sojourn at Union, and since I had more time on the G.I. Bill, I decided to go to Edinburgh, Scotland, and spend some time at New College. My brief sojourn at New College, where I arrived with \$900 in my pocket, not expecting to stay very long, eventually became a three-year period of graduate study including four months of language study as a guest of the Protestant Seminary in Montpelier, France, an institution which was supported by the Presbyterian Church, USA.

During the time before my classes started at New College, I had the opportunity to visit the historic Island of Iona, where Dr. George MacLeod had fathered the now well-known Iona Community. Although I didn't get to meet Dr. MacLeod as he was not on the island, it was nonetheless a unique and memorable "monastic" experience, unlike any other in my life. We spent much of the time in silence, going about doing ordinary things like saying prayers and putting new shingles on the roof of the chapel. I felt somewhat like a beginner being exposed to a new language.

When I enrolled at New College, I was fortunate to find lodgings — "digs" — with a retired Church of Scotland couple. He introduced me (a Southern Baptist) to his friends in the main office on Princes Street, and they signed me up for Sunday supply work. Every other week for more than two years I spent most of my weekends, and earned most of my rent, boarding a double-decker bus and journeying north, south, or out to an island to fill a vacancy in a Scottish church.

Most of the churches were small — but not the Perth church to the north, where, unexpectedly, I was called on to do an infant baptism. After I had vested, an usher said to me, "You know, you have an infant baptism." I did not know. In shock, I explained I was a Southern Baptist and had never seen a baby baptized. "The family has come a long way," he said, "and will

be very disappointed.” Fortunately, I had brought along a copy of the Presbyterian Manual and, somehow, with the mother patiently holding the baby, I got through the baptism and the congregation was seated.

That was my one and only visit to Perth as I usually went to different churches every Sunday. That was not bad — I didn’t have to prepare many sermons since I was not bound to a lectionary.

Scotland was for me an ecumenical experience. Presbyterian churches received me, a Southern Baptist, warmly; they took me in, listened to me, and rewarded me. But it was the Anglican church at the far end of Princes Street in Edinburgh that lured me and finally changed the course of my ministry and my life. After working all day in the library I would steal into that Episcopal church at the far end of Princes Street where the door was always open and just sit and look at the altar and the beautiful stained glass windows. The general atmosphere of the church and the link with history and the liturgy touched me as a daily affair with the lectionary, not just a Sunday affair. I felt at home there; it added something to my Baptist heritage that was good.

I gradually and laboriously became acquainted with the Book of Common Prayer. On Sundays when I was free, I attended this church, became acquainted with the rector, and slowly learned to use the prayer book with the minister’s help.

Before attending the Protestant Seminary in France, I spent two weeks vacationing in Paris at a hotel that was recommended to me by an acquaintance from Edinburgh. The fee was 25 cents a night, and it was hard even then to believe the cost.

I guess I didn’t realize it, but when it came time to board the ship for home, with about \$900 still in my pocket, I was beginning to feel somewhat like an Anglican. I had somehow ceased to be what I had always assumed I was meant to be, liturgically and theologically.

To this day, I remain grateful to my Baptist preacher father for what he and my mother taught me, and I’m sure my experience in the churches of Scotland made a difference in my ministry — how could I ever forget all those wonderful people I met? I shall always be greatly indebted to them.



Bill spends a considerable amount of time reading Church periodicals, general periodicals, newspapers, and a book now and then. Crossword puzzles help keep his mind active as he is turning 90 later this year. He and his wife, Mary Beth, live out in the woods in Scott Depot, West Virginia, where they enjoy birdwatching and regularly feed the birds and deer. They have two daughters living in Virginia.