

AIMEE SEMPLE McPHERSON

1890-1944

If you lived in the early 1900's, the centre of social life was your local school and church: probably your family participated in the weekly tradition of attending Sunday services. But occasionally an unexpected event intervened; that is, the arrival of a travelling minister who was often Pentecostal, a "Holy Roller" who preached hellfire and damnation, and spoke about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Often the orderly and conservative services of the Methodist or Presbyterian churches seemed dull compared to the high emotion and dramatic feeling that was aroused by the travelling preacher. He spoke in tents or old buildings and then moved on.

Such a preacher appeared on Ingersoll's main street in 1907, hoping to set up a small Pentecostal church. Many people came out to hear young Robert Semple's sermons which were delivered each night in the old grocery store on the main street. Farmers and factory labourers formed the audience and every night the old store shook with handclapping and footstomping, joyful singing and shouts of "Amen" and "Hallelujah". It was to these meetings that a sixteen year old girl named Aimee Kennedy secretly went. She was a Salford-born high school student who later became world famous as a female evangelist.

Aimee was born a few miles west of Salford on a farm, an only child of James Kennedy and Minnie Pierce. Coming from a strongly religious background, Aimee learned Bible stories instead of nursery rhymes, and often made the Sunday trip to church with her mother. While attending Salford Public School she was imaginative and outgoing. Later she went to high school in Ingersoll where her courage and wit made her many friends: as winner of a popularity contest, Aimee travelled down the St. Lawrence on a small boat cruise!

Aimee was athletic, intelligent, beautiful, and well-liked, although her aggressive behaviour and high ambitions set her apart from the other girls who were taught to be lady-like, humble and conservative. At this point in her life, Aimee planned to be an actress, but something happened at age seventeen

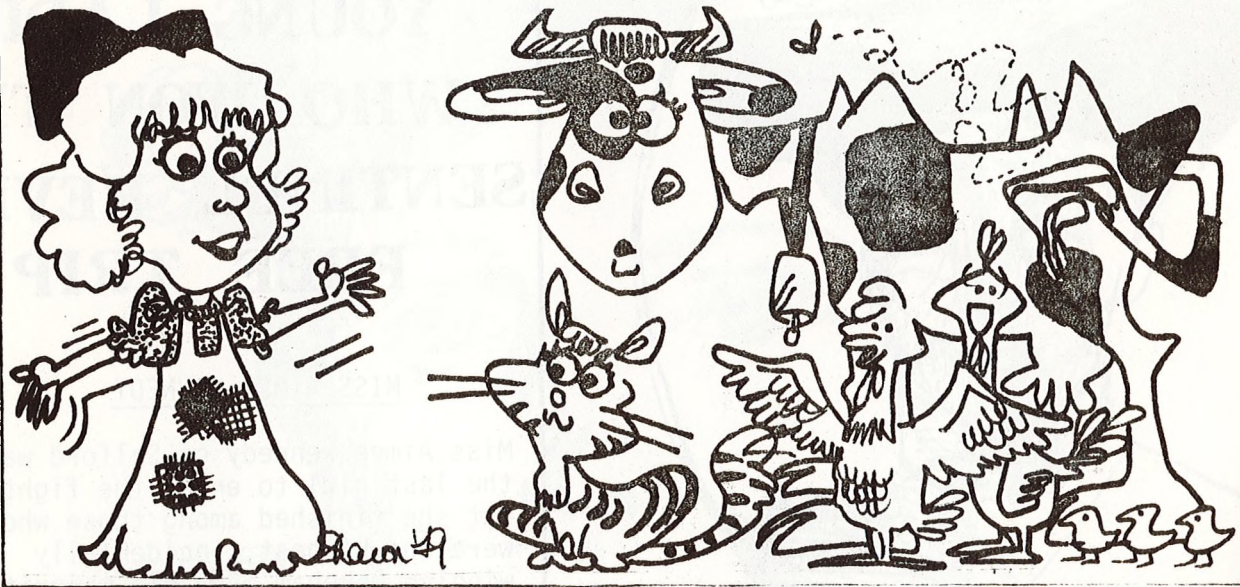
**HERE ARE THE
YOUNG LADIES
WHO WON THE
SENTINEL REVIEW
FREE TRIP**

MISS AIMEE KENNEDY

Miss Aimee Kennedy of Salford was the last girl to enter the fight, but she finished among those who were the highest, incidentally winning Dereham by a big majority. Miss Kennedy is popular among her associates, and worked indefatigably to win the trip. She also is an elocutionist of ability and ambition.

Aimee Kennedy, one of the girls in Oxford County who won the contests sponsored by the Sentinel Review, received a free trip as a prize. (from the Sentinel Review, Aug. 31, 1907)

Even as a child, Aimee was an actress through and through, and delighted in being the centre of attention. She loved to speak in front of a lot of people; her quick mind enabled her to chant whole chapters of the Bible at someone's wish. But one of her favourite activities was a secret: she would slip out of the house and into the barn, and there, pretend to be a famous preacher in front of her admiring audience of cows, horses, chickens, and cats!!!



which changed her life--the arrival of the Pentecostal minister, Robert Semple.

While at Ingersoll Collegiate Institute, Aimee left a school play rehearsal to visit the "Holy Ghost Revival" conducted by Robert Semple. She found the high spirits of the service fascinating and began skipping classes to attend the services. Soon she fell in love with the minister, Mr. Semple, and they were married. This was perhaps the happiest time of Aimee's life. The young couple left for China as missionaries where Aimee found her new life an exciting challenge. But in 1909, her new husband died, leaving Aimee with a baby, Roberta. She was now on her own. Frightened by the thoughts of living along and supporting her child in a strange land, she returned home and quickly married again, this time to a grocery clerk, Harold McPherson. Unfortunately, her life with him proved dull after



the glamour of overseas, and Aimee began travelling and preaching to escape the boredom. Restless, she left the children, Rolf and Roberta, with her mother, and set out alone as a "travelling revivalist".

By coincidence, or God's will, a local preacher at Mt. Forest was sick one day with a cold, so Aimee was called to replace him. She gathered a large crowd by her magnetic preaching and from then on was never without an audience.

Cheered by her reception in Ontario, Aimee left for California with her mother and children. Renting an auditorium in Los Angeles, Aimee preached a sermon which drew so many people that the 3500 seats were filled to overflowing. This was just the beginning of her success.

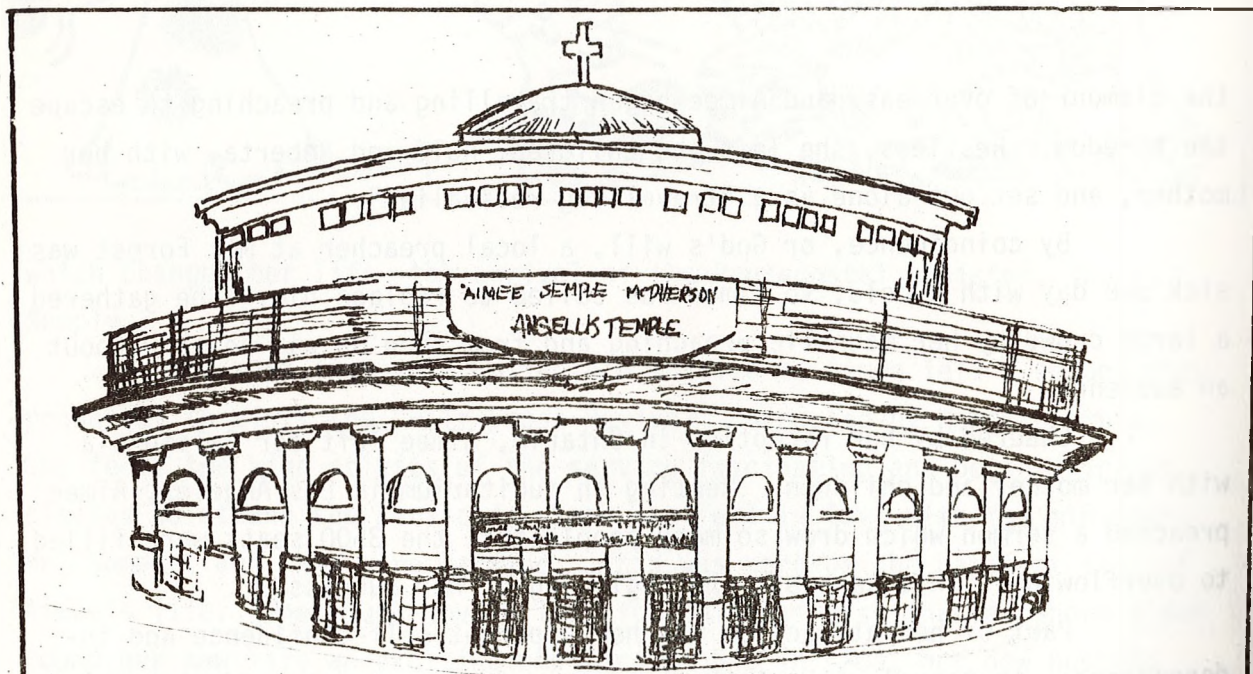
Part of her attraction was her apparent self-confidence and independence: to travel without the guidance of a man and to undertake plans which would be ambitious "even for a male preacher" was remarkable in the audience's eyes.

In 1921, Aimee travelled to San Diego and delivered a sermon which really marked the beginning of her great appeal and popularity. During her

eloquent speech, a crippled woman rose from her wheelchair and walked to the platform, followed by hundreds of other invalids who were miraculously "cured". Said Aimee, "I am not a healer. Jesus is the healer, I am only the little office girl who opens the door and says come in."²

Aimee reached the pinnacle of her success in the 1920's. This era was an unusual time, an exciting, extravagant "Jazz Age" when people earned, borrowed, and spent their money freely. Aimee is often called the Jazz Age Preacher, for she found her place in the carefree and happy times of the Roaring Twenties. In an age when everyone craved dramatic, sensational movies and books, the colourful style of Aimee's preaching drew followers like bees to honey.

From donations received at Aimee's gatherings (amounting to \$1,500,000.), the Angelus Temple was built in Los Angeles in 1923. The five thousand seats were always filled with an enthusiastic audience who came to hear Aimee speak--not of the old gospel of fear, but rather what she called



ANGELUS TEMPLE, Los Angeles (from a photo from the records of Byron Jenvey, Ingersoll)

Overflow audiences up to 40,000 sometimes flocked to Angelus Temple in Los Angeles to Aimee's services. The temple was built entirely by donations, and never had a mortgage on it.

her "Four Square Gospel" based on regeneration, divine healing, the Second Coming, and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. It was a message of joy and sunshine, charged with exuberant spirits.

Aimee became world famous as a woman evangelist. Thousands of people fell in love with her striking beauty, her sparkling personality, and her fervent preaching. The money poured into the offering plates every Sunday and was often used in good will projects such as aid for needy mothers, and families requiring money for food, clothing, or rent. Partly because of the extravagance of the 1920's, the next decade of the 1930's was a less wealthy one. During the Depression, Aimee's Four Square Gospel did excellent work in serving the needy and setting up "free food" kitchens for the hungry and unemployed. Missions were established all over the world and Aimee often visited them on tours.



Aimee McPherson Plans to Lead Easter Pilgrimage to Holy Land



Los Angeles, Aug. 7 -- Aimee Semple McPherson, the evangelist, is getting ready to stage the most pretentious project in her long career--a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, at the head of 750 students and followers, on a specially-chartered steamship the S. S. Republic, engaged at a cost of a half million dollars.

The steamship will leave New York next March 20 and return May 11, as her pilgrims will spend Easter there.

"Ever since I was a little child I have dreamed of conducting a crusade to the land where Christianity was born," Mrs. McPherson

explains. "Three years ago I visited the Holy Land with only a few followers and now at last my supreme ambition is about to be realized."

Mrs. McPherson has tied up virtually every hotel reservation in the Holy Land during Easter week, making it almost impossible for other worshippers to stay there.

PROGRAM IS IMPRESSIVE

An impressive program has been arranged.

On Holy Thursday, communion will be administered to the pilgrims in the room at Mount Zion where the Last Supper was held.

After communion, their way lighted by 70 torches the procession of 750 followers will wend its way down the mountainside to the Garden of Gethsemane where the pilgrims will maintain an attitude of prayer throughout the rest of the day and night.

At dawn of Good Friday her army will trek to the excavated hall of Pontius Pilate, there to hear the reading of the trial of Christ and give an impressive ceremony.

Good Friday afternoon the itinerants will go by way of the Via Dolorosa to Calvary where the Saviour's cries from the cross will be repeated by the assemblage in hushed tones.

Saturday will be given up to prayer and rest while the Angelus Temple band plays a special program of sacred music.

TO BAPTIZE IN JORDAN

On Easter morning the party will journey to the Holy Sepulchre where the Saviour lay before rising from the dead. At the tomb the rite of lighting 750 candles by contact with one another will symbolize the propagation of the faith.

As a post Easter program the caravan will travel to Bethany and Bethlehem, thence across the hills surrounding the Holy City of Jericho,

Pilgrimage to Holy Land.....cont'd.

the Dead Sea and the sacred river Jordan.

A massed baptism will be held in the waters of the river Jordan with Sister McPherson officiating. The

baptism will close the pilgrimage program with an optional sidetrip offered to Oberammergau where Anton Lang appears as the Christus in the Passion Play.

(from the Woodstock Daily Sentinel-Review,
August 7, 1929)

Because Aimee lived in an age where scandals and sensational stories filled the newspapers, it is hard to try to find the truth about the events and people that surrounded her. Unfortunately, Aimee was a victim of this "sensationalist" publicity, and today there are mixed feelings about her. In 1926, Aimee was at a beach, swimming, and suddenly disappeared! Where she had gone was a great mystery. When she returned thirty-two days later, she claimed to have been kidnapped, and the newspapers picked up the story. There are fascinating but complicated accounts of Aimee's mysterious disappearance (see Resources if you are interested in finding more about Aimee's "mystery") but no one knows the real truth. The fact that the newspapers of California printed exaggeration and scandal rather than important events is a characteristic picture of the 1920's and 1930's.

Aimee lived a very dramatic life. Always in the public eye, any human mistakes she made were magnified greatly: for instance, although she preached against divorce, she was divorced twice herself, and this of course brought many "oohs" and "aahs" from people all over North America, even back in Salford, her home town. Yet Sister Aimee did leave her mark on the world, and through her constant energy and generosity achieved a great deal.

For a woman at this time to set off alone and undertake an occupation traditionally held by men was truly remarkable. Woman ministers were unheard of--it was St. Paul who said:

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience...And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church.
(I Corinthians 14:35-5)

Yet in contradiction to this age-old attitude was the Victorian idea of women's superior moral sense, which perhaps eased the way for lady missionaries. Aimee Semple McPherson was still different from the rare women missionaries. While these ladies worked hard, collected money, and then handed all proceeds over to male-dominated Church Boards, Aimee and her mother managed the huge profits of Angelus Temple by themselves, an outstanding accomplishment at that time.

Aimee had to work hard to overcome public opinion against female ministers. Her trip to Salford in 1934 proved her great skill and talent at doing this very thing. Hundreds of people paid admission to hear the world's most famous evangelist, most of them out of curiosity. A man who attended the service in Ingersoll said, "We expected to hear her babble on like a woman, you know. But the funny part about it was that she had us 'amening' and 'hallelujahing' like oldtimers before the service was over."³ In this way, Aimee achieved a great deal in opening the public's minds towards the "capabilities" of females.

Her influence can also be seen in the lasting presence of the Four Square Gospel Church. In 1970, the Church was still thriving with membership at 193,000 and property valued at \$59,000,000. There were 776 churches in the United States and Canada and over 2,000 overseas mission churches in 27 countries. Aimee Semple McPherson is remembered today as a courageous, talented woman who made a definite contribution to the world of evangelical religion.

AIMEE VERSUS SATAN

-An Illustrated Sermon-

If you were able to attend one of Aimee Semple McPherson's sermons, it was a unique experience! While the conservative churches of Los Angeles often stood empty, the Angelus Temple was always filled. Aimee advertised what she called "illustrated sermons" which were church services like you have probably never seen before. With footlights, scenery, and various props to dramatize her text, Aimee acted out her sermons, making her moral very clear to the audience. An example of one of the pantomimes was the appearance of a man dressed up like the devil--with horns, tail, and a pitchfork to match! Aimee used this character in her sermon, ordering "Satan" to withdraw to let God reveal his greatness.

Byron Jenvey, Ingersoll's local historian, recalled a friend's account of one of Aimee's services. When the collection was being taken up, Byron's friend placed a two dollar bill in the pail, a fair amount of money for those days. Shaking his head, the usher said, "Oh, sir! Keep those two dollars for yourself if that's all you can give. We don't take anything less than a five." With a sales pitch like that, no wonder the Angelus Temple drew in such huge profits!⁴

AIMEE MCPHERSON TELLS LIFE STORY IN TORONTO HALL

Evangelist Says 34,000 Baptized at Temple—Relates Narrative of Kidnapping

TORONTO, Sept. 8.—Several thousand Torontonians, who had paid 25 cents to \$1 admission last evening, listened to the life story of Aimee Semple McPherson, evangelist, in Maple Leaf Gardens. In a gown of egg-shell crepe, the cape and frilled cuffs lined with scarlet, and wearing a red-jewelled cross pendant, Mrs. McPherson, held forth for more than an hour. The Ukrainian Choir in picturesque costume, rendering a group of choruses, provided a colorful background. Aimee Semple McPherson, however, led the singing of "God Save the King," and one verse of "Onward Christian Soldiers," in opening the meeting.

Holding aloft in one hand a white-bound Bible and in the other a text-book on evolution, she recalled those days in high school when she had been taught her first lesson in evolution.

"I had been taught to believe in the Bible absolutely from cover to cover, the good old Wesley style," she said, and told how during a recent visit in Boston she had been shocked to note the increase in professed atheism. She scored ministers who, mounting to their platforms today, denied the Virgin birth.

Dramatically, Mrs. McPherson told of her experience in an evangelistic mission meeting in the Ontario home town; her marriage to the young missionary, Robert Semple, and her two years in China; her first campaign in a little mission in the north of Ontario and the gradual development of her meetings embracing the building of Angelus Temple. The Angelus Temple, she pointed out, represented twenty-four years' work, in which she had invested all her earnings in that time. There, during a ten-year period, she said, 34,000 people had been baptized by immersion.

The story of her kidnapping was briefly outlined. Many illustrations punctuated the lecture. She told of the danger she had encountered only yesterday, when driving from Brampton, the automobile travelling at 70 miles an hour had the misfortune to blow out a tire, "and for a little careened wildly on its course."

At the close of the meeting hundreds in the audience made a rush to the platform to shake hands. A large bouquet of gladiolus which had been presented to Mrs. McPherson upon her entrance into the auditorium were scattered among members of the audience.

Sept. 8, 1934

Woodstock Sentinel Review

"Aimee's Dramatic Pose"



EVANGELIST
AIMEE KENNEDY SEMPLE
McPHERSON
FOUNDER OF ANGELUS TEMPLE
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
USA
BORN SALFORD, ONTARIO - 1890
INTERRED
GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA - 1944
DAUGHTER OF
JAMES MORGAN KENNEDY
INTERRED
HARRIS STREET CEMETERY
WEST OXFORD TOWNSHIP

Plaque Hangs at Salford Public School