

The Haystack Anniversary

On the campus of Williams College in the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts stands a monument to... a haystack. That peculiar shrine marks the spot where a small group of pious undergraduate men sought shelter from a sudden summer thunderstorm under a haystack while they were praying together in the fields.



As the lightning flashed, and the students continued in their devotions, they resolved to become missionaries and to share the gospel worldwide.

We celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary of that Haystack Meeting, which inspired the first American foreign missionary movement.

After graduating from Williams, Samuel Mills continued his education at Andover Theological Seminary, where he inspired others to join him in seeking support for their overseas ministry. That support came in 1810, when they successfully petitioned a group of New England Congregational clergy to form the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, the first overseas missionary body in the United States. Two years later, five young men, accompanied by the wives of three, sailed for India – the first of many thousands who would follow them in witness to God in the wider world.

Although Congregational in its origins, the American Board welcomed participation by members of other denominations in its governance, even as it encouraged denominational cooperation overseas. Leaders saw no reason to perpetuate the “scandalous” divisions among Protestants in North America in foreign fields. Besides, duplication of efforts to bring the Bible, as well as education and medicine, to faraway people was inefficient. In short, from its inception, the first American overseas mission movement was ecumenical.

We thank God for these pioneers and their worldwide witness.

200 Years of Mission

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