

Cameroon, Africa Mission History Project

PURPOSE: To organize and make more accessible the Cameroon mission materials in the North American Baptist Heritage Center at the Sioux Falls Seminary in South Dakota and publish a short history about the missionaries and their Cameroonian colleagues. See “Activities/Objectives” below for details.

INTRODUCTION:

There are a variety of documents and other materials from Baptist missionaries who served in Cameroon and their supporting mission leaders and churches at home in the archives of the North American Baptist (NAB) Heritage Center. Within the millions of words and thousands of pictures of these records is a fascinating story about the work of North American, Canadian, British, Jamaican, and German missionaries with most of the documents relating to the North American Baptist missionaries.

The first Baptist missionaries to Cameroon from North America were August and Anna Steffens who arrived there in 1891. They had responded to a call from Cameroonian Baptist leaders asking that missionaries come over and help their two struggling Native Baptist churches. These churches had been planted earlier by British Baptist missionaries. However, by 1887 the British missionaries had left Cameroon because of disagreements with the German colonial government that had forcibly taken over Cameroon in 1884. August Steffens was a student in the German Department of the Rochester Seminary in upstate New York, the forerunner of today’s Sioux Falls Seminary, when he first read of this call from Cameroon. He decided to go there even though at that point he had no visible support base for such an undertaking. However, in his words, “I do not think that I should have any financial need because the Lord, if it is His will, will open a way.”

August Steffens served in Cameroon for 18 months until malaria ended his life at age thirty-two. However, his wife Anna continued and others followed so that against incredible odds over the years, more churches were planted, schools started, and medical facilities established - all proclaiming in word and deed the Good News of Jesus. In 1954 leaders of the Cameroonian Baptist churches formed the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC). By 1975 all Baptist mission properties were turned over to the CBC and Cameroonians took the lead in the continuing partnership with the missionaries who served mainly in support roles of medical ministries and post-primary education.

Organizing the *Cameroon Mission History Collection* started in 2001 as NAB archival materials and additional document copies from Cameroon were assembled for writing a book on the history of Baptist missionaries and their Cameroonian colleagues. It became apparent that writing an overall history needed careful research of a broad scope of materials. Summaries of historical materials were placed in computer files in order to prepare a catalog and indices so continuous cross-checking during research could be more easily carried out. Retired and active missionaries along with retired and active Cameroonians serving in churches, schools, and medical facilities were interviewed for their stories.

Along with the materials already in the archives, more books and other materials were added to the *Collection* as the organizing, cataloging and book-writing continued. For example, a 1940-50s NAB missionary provided a manuscript of his memoirs entitled “Africa: the Rest of the Story”. Also, several books and other materials written in German telling about the early Baptist missionaries were translated into English.

Steps were taken to better preserve older documents. For example, Annual Reports, Field Committee Minutes, correspondence, etc. going back over 85 years were placed in transparent acid-free sheet protectors for better preservation and in binders for easier access. Surprises surfaced as the Collection grew. For example, over 50 academic papers (theses, dissertations, etc.) about Cameroon missions and churches have been collected. Most are by Baptist missionaries or Cameroonians as part of their studies in seminaries and universities in masters and doctorate degree programs.

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The range and quality of photographs, slides and videos (including some 1930s 8 and 16 mm movie films) has led to a projected additional objective. That is an audio–visual presentation showing the NAB missionaries and their Cameroonian colleagues ministering together through the years and how this has made a significant difference for the better over the years in the lives of millions of Cameroonians.

Much can be learned from reading these accounts of how over the years in God’s Providence these missionaries and Cameroonian colleagues continued to press on, ministering in word and deed despite the many obstacles and setbacks they encountered. Stories of the difference for good made in the lives of Cameroonians abound in the materials of this *Collection*. Today the ministries continue to expand and new ministries develop through people in the churches, schools, and varied healthcare programs of the Cameroon Baptist Convention.

CATEGORIES / SECTIONS:

- A. Books** (Including unpublished manuscripts and English translations of works in other languages)
- B. Pamphlets** (Including brochures, booklets, etc.)
- C. Academic Papers** (Cameroon-related dissertations, theses, research project reports, etc.)
- D. Periodical/Magazine Articles** (Cameroon-related articles from CBC, NAB and Non-NAB/CBC publications)
- E. Newspaper Articles** (from Cameroonian, North American and other newspapers)
- F. Historical Web Pages and E-Newsletters** (that are no longer online)
- G. Annual Field Reports of the NAB Cameroon Baptist Mission**

Sections **H – Q** are restricted to persons authorized by the NAB Heritage Commission Executive Committee

- H. Annual Missionary Field Conference Minutes/Reports**
- I. Field Council/Committee Minutes**
- J. Field Council/Committee Correspondence Follow-up regarding the Minutes**
- K. Missionary Quarterly Reports**
- L. Field Superintendent/Secretary Circular Letters** to Missionaries
- M. Missionary and NAB Office Communications with Churches and Individuals**
- N. White Cross Program** (medical supplies sent by the NAB Women’s Missionary Union)
- O. Correspondence and Other Documents** not already in Sections G – N. (These are mainly copies of Cameroon-related correspondence from the home office files of the NAB General Missionary Secretary)
- P. Cameroon Baptist Convention Documents** (Minutes of General Session, Council, Executive Committee, Education Authority, and Medical Authority meetings, etc. with related correspondence and other documents including materials from the Women’s Union and 3 H -Head, Heart, Hands for Christ- Girls programs)
- Q. Nigeria** (Various materials from Mambilla Mission, Woyke House residence, and Hillcrest School in Jos, Nigeria for NAB Cameroon missionary children. Before 1961 the Mambilla area was part of Cameroon)
- R. Oversize Materials** (maps, posters, etc. too large for regular size shelves)
- S. Photographs, 35 mm Slides & Film Strips**
- T. Audio Cassettes, 8 & 16 mm Movie Films, VHS Videos, CDs, and DVDs**
- U. Paintings** depicting Cameroon life
- V. Artifacts from Cameroon**

ACTIVITIES / OBJECTIVES:

- 1. Organize into a coherent and online-accessible *Cameroon Mission History Collection*, the Cameroon materials** (books, pamphlets, academic papers, periodical articles, correspondence, still photographs, slides, videos, DVDs, etc.) in the NAB Heritage Center at the Sioux Falls Seminary. Process the materials for long-term preservation. Add other key Cameroon materials to the *Collection*. 95% complete.

2. Create digital files and printouts of the *Collection*'s Catalog, Indices and Appendices. 70% complete

Note: Volunteers with experience in preparing documents using Microsoft Word are needed to key in the titles, authors and other information of materials still to be added to the Catalog and Indices.

3. Generate the Catalog and Indices files needed to integrate the *Collection* into the NAB Heritage Commission Website thus making it accessible and searchable from the Internet. 50% complete.

(An early version is available on the Web and can be accessed via Google using "Cameroon Mission History" or by going directly to www.nabarchives.org/collections/cameroon-mission-history/).

4. Produce an illustrated book on the history of Baptist missions in Cameroon focusing on the 1891-1975 ministries of NAB missionaries and their Cameroonian colleagues. Hopefully this can be an inspiration to today's rising generation of missionaries and Cameroonians to complete the evangelization of Cameroon in villages where the Good News of Jesus is yet to be heard and seen through word and deed. 70% complete.

(The book is being written by John Siewert, retired global mission researcher/writer with World Vision and Daphne Dunger, retired Cameroon missionary nurse/educator who led the start of the LAP village healthcare initiative).

5. Produce a PowerPoint type of audio–visual presentation on the history of the Cameroon Baptist missions, using stories from the book and visual materials of the *Collection*. in talking stage.

Note: Volunteers with experience in writing, editing, and producing such a presentation are needed.

(Note: John Siewert plans to retire as project coordinator by June of 2016).