

PROFILES

OF MENNONITE FAITH

Rondo Horton

"Moses on this Mountain"

The voice of the Lord was persistent, demanding a response, as the faces of lost people floated through Rondo Horton's mind. These people would perish without the good news of Jesus. "Did you tell them?" Horton, kneeling in the barn, submitted to the call of God on his life for ministry, and agreed, "Yes, I will tell them." At his ordination in 1933, Peter H. Siemens strongly affirmed this 38-year-old ministerial candidate: "Brother Rondo is a real



Rondo Horton and his wife Ruth Whittington

Mennonite; true to God, a good speaker and a Bible scholar. He is a serious Christian, has a good character, is a conscientious preacher, and an industrious man who keeps his word and promises, and is an example for the people."

Krimmer Mennonite Brethren (KMB) missionaries had long before birthed a missionary work among the African-Americans in the hills of North Carolina and Tennessee at the turn of the century. Did these young missionary couples from Kansas and South Dakota realize that their vision would result in a conference of a half-dozen active Bible-

believing churches? Rondo Horton was a product of this first Mennonite work among blacks in America.

Rondo David Horton, son of June and Betty (Grimes) Horton, was born in Watauga County, North Carolina, April 27, 1895. Coming from a large family with very limited means,

Rondo was taught the value of hard work, honesty, and fairness from his youth. Rondo went to school at the Mennonite orphanage, although

he was not an orphan. His education was obtained in exchange for light work on the grounds, including feeding ducks, chickens and pigs, working in the garden, handling the horses, cleaning the schoolhouse, and building a dam for a baptismal pool. In time he realized his need of a savior, accepted Christ, and was baptized, becoming a member of the KMB church at Boone, North Carolina.

P. H. Siemens recognized a teachable spirit in young Horton and invested himself in Horton's spiritual education.

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This close mentoring relationship resulted in such comments as “Rondo was very like Siemens.” In the absence of the Siemenses, Rondo Horton served as moderator of the North Carolina churches from 1934 to 1938 and regularly sent in reports of the work to the *Wahrheitsfreund*. During this time, two new stations were established (Cove Creek and West End), the first Sunday school conventions were held, and Rondo was invited to participate at the KMB conference sessions held in Carpenter, SD, in 1935, preaching three messages and providing special music. His servant spirit was evident in his report to the conference at that time, “We are thankful to the Lord and to the Conference that we have had the chance to work in this mission, that the Conference counted us worthy for this place and trusted it to our hands.” The conference delegates received Rondo’s messages and reports with much joy and enthusiasm.

Rondo organized the first youth camp for the North Carolina churches with a program of Bible study, singing, and recreation in 1945. This camp continued operation first at Darby and later at Ferguson, for fifty years.

Rondo Horton took over the full administration of the North Carolina district in the mid-1950s when the Siemenses left. As moderator or “district superintendent,” Horton made decisions regarding the pastorate of each congregation, following the system established by P. H. Siemens. He reassigned the pastors annually, rotating them through the churches. In this way, all the pastors pastored each church in the North Carolina district, often several churches at a time.

Described as “truly Mennonite,” Rondo Horton preached Bible-based sermons which were not showy or flamboyant in style, yet carried the power of the truths of the Word of God. As a “Bible-man,” when Christians did not act quite as they should, he was often heard to say, “Christians would do better if they only knew how.” Deeper

study into God’s word would result in godly behavior. Rondo, bold and outspoken, was very protective of his flock, and continually admonished his parishioners to have a strong foundation in God’s word. “What does the Bible say?” he would ask.

Rondo lived through some tumultuous social change in the south, yet harbored no resentment or bitterness. He himself did not discriminate and employed both black and white men in his coal delivery business. As a bi-vocational pastor, he supported himself as the owner of an ice and coal business in Boone. “He took care of coal for everyone, black and white. No one went without fuel in the winter. For this he was loved and respected by everyone, because he cared for people.”

Rondo Horton and his wife Ruth Whittington did not have any biological children, yet served as parents to a large spiritual family in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Rondo and “Miss Ruth” served the Lord together for 47 years until Ruth’s death in 1980. Rondo remarried to Dora Maxwell and continued serving the North Carolina conference as moderator until his death, June 23, 1986, at the age of 91 years. Even in his old age, Horton was viewed as a strong leader - “a gentle and profoundly spiritual patriarch,” whose favorite sermon topic was “salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus.” Rondo Horton, this Moses on the mountain, did not want anyone to miss the kingdom of God.

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No. 30, Spring 2005.

Written by Peggy Goertzen, Hillsboro, KS.
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