



## 14 ❖ Gladys Fox, unlikely donor

I found the sheets of 5" x 8" tablet paper in an "F" folder tagged "miscellaneous" in the Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission archives. The upcoming centennial celebration of Congo Inland Mission had prompted us to comb through these archives, which are in the custody of the Illinois Historical and Genealogical Society near Metamora, Illinois.

Tucked among routine housekeeping materials, which we sorted and threw away, were these one-page notes, written in pencil. They were dated in the 1930s and 1940s and addressed to Rev. C. E. Rediger, secretary-treasurer of Congo Inland Mission. Not all the notes had a return address, but those that did were marked simply "Flanagan, Illinois."

In note after note, the message was essentially the same: "Enclosed find my check in the amount of \$300"—or \$200 or \$400. There would sometimes be a brief suggestion for how to use it in Congo—for a boy's dormitory at such and such a station, roofing on a girl's school at another station, or Christian literature somewhere else. Now and again a line would be added: "Please do not attach my name to the gift."

At the bottom of each note was the same penciled name: Gladys Fox.

Two things astonished me. First was the size of the gifts. Times were hard in rural America in the 1930s and 1940s. Even a twenty-

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photo—Gladys Fox

dollar gift to Congo Inland Mission during those decades was considered generous. But here came these periodic checks, each made out for hundreds of dollars!

Even more surprising was that they came from Gladys Fox. I knew Gladys well when I was a schoolboy. We both attended Salem Mennonite Church, located between Gridley and Flanagan, Illinois.

Gladys had come from Kansas in response to the advertised need for help at the nearby Salem Children's Home. Serving at the home as matron of small boys, she received board and room and a stipend for her services. But my boyhood impression was that this tall, large-boned woman with an awkward, swinging stride did not have much money.

Gladys seemed to have two or three summer dresses and two or three winter ones. She always wore the same no-nonsense black shoes. She wore her hair in long braids wrapped around her head, covering them with a knitted cap in winter. She seemed shy, rarely initiating conversation. She clearly was not a woman who sought attention. Above all, one had the sense that whether because she wanted to or needed to, she pinched her pennies.

But here were those sheets torn from a tablet with the penciled notes, dating back to the era of economic depression and then war in our country, recording gifts to Congo Inland Mission of many hundreds of dollars! How was that possible?

Finally, I found the note that explained everything.

"Dear Mr. Rediger, I have recently received an inheritance from my mother. I have been praying about how to use it. The Lord is leading me to give it to help support missionary work in the Congo. Please keep me informed about needs there. Gladys."

I read and reread that note as I summoned up my boyhood memories of the Gladys I knew. Even as she limited herself to a frugal wardrobe and lived a simple life, she was quietly sending checks to Congo Inland Mission and asking to remain anonymous. In one of those notes she said, "My family would not understand."

At centennial time, we are coming to realize more and more that across the years God has been at work on both sides of the ocean. God's Spirit was stirring the hearts of simple rural people in North America to volunteer for missionary service. God was also at work convicting people in the pews of Mennonite congregations to pray and to give generously, even sacrificially, so a new inter-Mennonite

presence and witness in the heart of Africa could grow. Indeed CIM/  
AIMM has been God's doing all along. Thank you, Lord.

Jim Bertsche