

## **A Look Back at the First Brethren Training School for Missionaries in the USA**



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In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Richard Hill and his wife served the Lord in Russia, Persia, Turkmenistan, and Armenia. They saw many souls saved and received several eager missions-focused young people who helped them in their work.

While in the United States in 1917, they sensed from the Lord that there was a growing need for a missionary training school to become established among assemblies in North America to better prepare the ever-growing number of young workers being called by the Lord to serve abroad.

And so, on March 10, 1917, the Hills sent out letters to the brethren assemblies in North America informing them of their burden and intentions to launch a Training School for Misisonaries. They stressed that they probably could only take on five or six pupils for this first term and mentioned that some brothers who were involved in the medical field were to provide some practical medical training which was desperately needed in foreign missions work at the time– not only for ministry but also for survival.

By May of 1917 the first training had already begun in the Hills' home in Brooklyn, New York, and, from what we can tell, there were definitely more than six students! Throughout the next ten years, this school became a training ground and launch pad for many missionaries. The alumni include a list of "who's-who" of North American assembly missionaries with names such as Raymond & Julia Dibble (Nigeria), Cyril & Anna Brooks (Philippines), Leonard and Irene Bewick (Jamaica), Wallace & Ruth Logan (Zambia), Peggy Fleming-Kramer (Guatemala), Albert & Petronella Horton (Angola), James & Margaret Buckley (China), Malcolm & Edna MacJannet (Angola), Miss Hildur Ekman (India), George and Ruth Rainey (China), and sisters Sarah and Marie LeTourneau (China), among many others. Each one would go on to remark, in their memoirs or letters, of the impact that this short but robust training school had on their lives and ministry.

The Hills recognized that simply filling students' heads with knowledge, no matter how helpful, practical, or even biblical, was not enough. The blessing of their efforts was going to require a movement of the Spirit of God, and a response from committed Christians unto a renewed effort to spread the Gospel. Their prayer was that the efforts of the Training School for Missionaries would be a conduit through which the Spirit chose to work.

In 1920 Richard Hill and his Training School for Missionaries sponsored the 15-day Sea Cliff Summer Bible and Missionary Conference, held on Long Island, New York. For a decade this conference became the much-prayed-for catalyst for revival, renewal, and gospel-zeal among the assemblies with the goal: "Christ made real."

From this zeal that swept the assemblies nationally came a new wave of men and woman who would dedicate themselves to missionary service and to church-planting efforts all across North America.

This ever-growing missionary activity from "the assemblies" caught the attention of national and foreign governments and necessitated formal representation. To respond to that need, Christian Missions in Many Lands (CMML) was formally incorporated in 1921. One of the founding board members of CMML was Richard Hill.

The Hills continued to be leaders in the equipping efforts of the assemblies from Missionary Study Classes, to editing various periodicals of the assemblies, to hosting and discipling many missionaries and young people in their own home.

Mr. & Mrs. Richard Hill were special people. They knew the value of training and organization but they also knew that if the people of God were not moved by the Spirit of God, all the training and organization was in vain.



For ten years their poured their lives into a small number of young people who came to the Missionary Training School and they were blessed to see the fruit of their efforts in their lifetimes.

Fast forward to today – one hundred years after the Training School for Missionaries, the Sea Cliff Conference, and the founding of CMML. Today, the work of the Gospel is expanding both locally and abroad like never before. There is an even greater need for assemblies to develop, train, and support the next generation. The same zeal, commitment, dedication, and preparation the Hills felt was needed in 1917 is needed today.

Throughout this past 100 years, several continent-wide Bible and missions training groups have sprung up, most notably Emmaus Bible College, the Discipleship Intern Training Program, the Galilee Program, the Ezekiel Project School of Evangelism, and CMML's Missionary Orientation Program. But there is a need for more engagement in these and other efforts.

Local church leaders must encourage, create, and support training and discipleship efforts to meet the needs of today. The next generation coming up in North America is by-far the most biblically illiterate generation in over 200 years. The need for equipping is massive.

Let us look to brethren who have gone before us, like Mr. & Mrs. Richard Hill, for examples of how we can have the vision to equip the next generation with the tools they need to see the fruit in our lifetimes. Let's all do our part to ensure those with a heart and zeal for the Lord's work are equipped to face the challenges before us today.

Sources:

*Bulletin of the Training School for Missionaries*; 1920-1929

*Voices from the Vineyard*; 1914-1969

*The Fields*; 1938-1967

*Missions*; 1980-1989

*Grace Triumphant* by Cyril Brooks

CMML Historical Archives