

## A. W. BANFIELD AND THE UMCA IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: The First Stages; 1901-1915

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Alexander Woods Banfield and his wife Althea ("Ella") Amanda Banfield are the founding or pioneering missionaries of the United Missionary Church of Africa, but very little is known in our churches about them. A. W. Banfield never had a biography, yet his decisions and policies shaped the first generation of the work of our mission.

This paper is offered as a first fruit of a personal research undertaken for some years on the life and work of A. W. Banfield. The original motive was to explain to UMCA youth why our church follows certain channels in missions and is flourishing in certain parts of Nigeria. The life of Banfield is instructive for the whole church now, more than 50 years after his death.

A number of important studies of the Christian Church in Nigeria mention Banfield, our mission and church.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, these books contain errors that show that the authors were unfamiliar with our story, and these errors get repeated.<sup>2</sup> Even our own writers and students misunderstand or ignore sources that would answer some often repeated questions about our church.<sup>3</sup>

A. W. Banfield came to be called "Zabokun Nupe" (White Nupe) during his 18 years in Nupeland. He gratefully took it to be a compliment. How did this man get to Nigeria? How did he become a Christian? What ideas of missionary work did he bring to Nigeria, and how did he change as a result of living here? How does his work affect us in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? These are some of the questions we may hope to address in this study of his life, up to 1915.

Alexander Woods Banfield was born in Quebec City, the capital of the province of Quebec, Canada, on Sunday, August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1878. His parents were William Henry Banfield and Elizabeth Jane Johnston. The couple were English settlers in a mainly French-speaking part of a British colony, part of the newly created Dominion of Canada. Alexander was the third of six children. The families were Methodist Christians.

Before the boy was 2 years old, however, the family moved to Toronto, the capital of the province of Ontario. Toronto was then a mainly English-speaking city of about 200,000 people. The father of the family went into an engineering business, manufacturing dies, tool-stamping presses and so on. Alex attended three primary schools in what is now the old centre of the city before the failure of his father's business in the economic depression in 1890. This meant that at 12 years, Alex had to leave school to work. At first he worked at a general goods shop, and then for a street railway company of Toronto. He enjoyed mechanical work of any kind. In 1896, Alex and a brother joined with their father who was beginning in business again. Alex started apprenticeship studies to be an engineer, following his father's profession. Engineering was not then a university-controlled profession.

At seventeen, Alex joined the regiment of the Canadian Army called the Queen's Own Rifles, which was something like a militia or reserve regiment. For Alex, it meant learning to play cornet part-time in the regimental band. This skill became useful in Nigeria in gathering a crowd! For a few years before 1900, Alex was a volunteer worker

for the Fred Victor Mission, a ministry to poor people in Toronto operated by his church. In Toronto, the Banfield family were members of a large middle-class Methodist Church of Canada congregation called the Metropolitan Church. There he met his future wife, Althea Priest, who was also a volunteer worker at the Mission.

A W Banfield recorded the date of his conversion in his application to the Africa Industrial Mission as October 18, 1900. Toward the end of 1900, at the age of 22, young Alexander Banfield had what he later described as a "soul-reviving experience" at the newly-opened eastern Toronto mission of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church on Parliament Street. He said he "felt the hand of God laid heavily upon me." In addition, he felt challenged to "give my life to (God) and to go to Africa as a missionary." Although the MBiC mission was not far from his home in Toronto, how a young Methodist got to the Mennonite mission is not clear. However, this Mennonite group was not merely Mennonite, but a revivalistic Wesleyan holiness church.

Canadian Methodists in 1900 were well aware of the revivalistic heritage of their church, but in some sections of their denomination, which was by then one of Canada's largest Protestant denominations, revivals and "scriptural holiness" were dying out. Until more records turn up, we can only guess what took Banfield to the MBiC mission.

Until 1897, the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada (as the Mennonite Brethren in Christ in Canada are now called), had almost no churches in any city in Canada, and few anywhere in the United States. Nearly all the members of this denomination were farmers. In 1900, they had about 1,500 members in Canada and about 2,300 in the United States.

However, in 1897, the MBiC<sup>2</sup> decided to move into Toronto. They began with evangelistic campaigns in two areas: on the east and west sides of the city. Elder (we would now call him "Reverend") Noah Detwiler was the mission leader for the first years. Some young women mission workers, supervised by him, were at first the main leaders of the eastern mission. Sarah Pool, a one-time missionary to China, was one of them in 1900-1901. It was common in those days for evangelistic meetings to last for weeks in a tent or rented hall. MBiC evangelists preached both salvation from sin through the work of Christ on the Cross, and the need to be made holy in heart by the purifying of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> Early missionaries to Nigeria mention missing the Church's camp-meetings and the regular church services. A "good" meeting was when many people wept at the benches for prayer and "prayed through" (that is, taking a long time) to victory over sin or until assured that God had filled their hearts with "perfect love."

According to Ella (Priest) Banfield, she had first come in touch with the Mennonite Brethren in Christ through the Sunday afternoon meetings of the Toronto West mission, then on Spadina Road. She said she had been converted in "Dr Watson's" tent preaching" and had attended a Methodist Sunday School. Later she moved to the eastern side of the city, where she met Alexander at the Fred Victor Mission. Soon after, the MBiC Parliament Street mission was opened, and both young people attended. There they were baptized as adult believers. Both became interested in missions to West Africa by reading and listening to returned missionaries.<sup>4</sup> Both applied to the Africa Industrial Mission (as the Sudan Interior Mission was known in those years). Alexander was accepted as the last of the 4 in the pioneer party of the SIM, but Althea had to wait 4 years before she could join him as his wife. Meanwhile, she was not wasting time; she became one of the city mission evangelists. In 1905, she married Alexander Banfield, and spent her first months of married life speaking with him in MBiC districts in Canada



and the United States.<sup>11</sup>

Banfield's family are curiously absent from most of the records of his missionary career. On one occasion they cared for his children, and one time donated money for a project in Nigeria. One wonders what they thought of his sudden new enthusiasm for missions.<sup>12</sup>

After A W Banfield's conversion, his life changed rapidly. The year of his conversion, he took up evening classes at the Toronto Missionary Training Institute (a forerunner of Tyndale University College and Seminary). This evangelical school, one of the earliest Bible Colleges, was founded in 1894 and supplied many older evangelical and newer "faith" missions with recruits. Graduates were in constant and close contact with the Institute. Banfield wrote that, while he did not then know the story of the MBiC pioneer missionaries like Eusebius Hershey, he began to read a lot about missions, listened to returned missionaries, and prayed for them in home prayer meetings. A board member of the young mission, Elmore Harris, was the founding principal of the Institute, and Rowland Bingham of the "AIM" (SIM's name from 1898 to 1907)<sup>13</sup> was a frequent visitor. Still, it is a wonder that in 1901, not even a year after his "soul-reviving experience," Alexander Banfield volunteered to be a missionary and was on his way to Nigeria.

On the board of the AIM was a Mennonite. The only Mennonites active in Toronto in those years up to 1901, were the MBiC. The denomination was the link that brought not just one, but two MBiC members to the attention of the AIM.

The second applicant for Africa was Ebenezer A Anthony, and in fact he was accepted before Banfield. Elder E A Anthony (1865-1913) was the Presiding Elder (Church District Superintendent, we would say), of the MBiC Michigan (USA) Conference. To serve in SIM meant he had to leave his family behind.

At the time of his death, Elder Anthony had 3 girls and one son, whose name, "Ray Banfield," shows he was born after the father's return from Nigeria. It is proof that Anthony had high regard for A W Banfield. Anthony was 13 years older than Banfield, and was chosen by the SIM group as the leader of the pioneer team, the only ordained man among the 4 of them, with over ten years' experience in ministry. Rowland Bingham later recalled that the SIM Council had accepted Banfield mainly because of his "mechanical ability." They believed him to be a sound Christian, of course, but they were not looking to him for leadership. He was 23! Bingham had high praise for Anthony's leadership: The leader of that party, while continuing on the field less than a year and a half, steadied things during the crucial period of getting the foundations laid.<sup>14</sup>

In our books, and those of ECWA and SIM, it is sometimes written as if "Rev" (he was not ordained until 1905) Banfield was the leader of the mission team, but that did not happen until the other three were dead or forced home due to sickness, in 1903. Nevertheless, Banfield's leadership was appreciated during the next year and a half (April 1903-January 1905).

The other two members of the 1901 team, Charles H. Robinson and Albert F. Taylor, were apparently Baptists, members of a Baptist congregation that Bingham pastored from 1896-98 in New York State (USA). There is no relationship of this Robinson to the two Robinson brothers of the CMS "Sudan Party" so far as one can tell, though one had the same first name and initial, "Charles H."<sup>15</sup> Like Banfield and Anthony, these young men deserve much credit for the success of the SIM in getting established at all in Northern Nigeria, but little seems to have been published about any

of them. Taylor's early death and Robinson's early return from Africa, no doubt, make their stories difficult to trace. One thing we should notice is that this new mission, like many (but not all) in missions history, was begun by the young men, as we would count them in Nigeria. In 1901, Bingham himself was only 28 or 29.

The mission's goal was the Muslim Hausa of Northern Nigeria. The south had had missions for over 50 years, and had thousands of Christians already. Taylor and Robinson were sent to Tripoli in North Africa (now in Libya). There they could study Hausa with the colony of Hausa traders while avoiding the danger of West African diseases that took so many European lives. The two men, and a married couple from England, studied Hausa for part of a year. Unfortunately, the English couple did not get along with the two North Americans. Anthony and Banfield went to England to meet with Taylor and Robinson before coming to Nigeria together. They stayed a month in Liverpool, speaking in many churches and missions.<sup>18</sup>

Bingham and another member of the mission council also went to England, and attempted to reconcile the missionaries during a week of Bible exhortation and prayer. Reconciliation may not have happened, but Bingham believed that something good resulted from the week's delay in Liverpool. They all had a chance to meet Lieutenant-Colonel (later Lord) Frederick Lugard. Lugard was just returning to Nigeria with his position of High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria (he was not Governor-General until later).<sup>19</sup> Lugard encouraged the men to travel on the same ship to Nigeria with him, and he was quite willing to help them find a place to establish a missionary base, as long as it was not in Muslim emirates opposed to Christian missions. Since the SIM did want to reach the Muslim north, this restriction immediately set the mission in opposition to that policy of the colonial government. On its part, the government saw the missions' role as pacifying and civilizing. Lugard reported at the end of the year that, "Dr. Miller (of the CMS) and Rev. Anthony... afford us every confidence that both missions will be of great value in the work of civilization and progress."<sup>20</sup>

The four men of the African Industrial Mission (i.e. SIM) prepared to sail for Africa. At a farewell meeting, an unexpected offering exactly covered their expenses, and they were encouraged. They left the city of Liverpool, England, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1901 on a ship called the Royal Mail Steamer Bornu. In both UMS and SIM accounts, on board the ship, the ship's doctor made the famous prediction to Anthony that all of them would soon die, and "you see that young man, Banfield: you will bury him out here in six months: he will be the first of your party to die."<sup>21</sup> By the mercy of God, after two and a half years, only Banfield was healthy enough to carry on. Banfield and all the others knew the hazards. He himself "bade farewell to some of our passengers whom we felt would never see England again."<sup>22</sup>

At the mouths of the Niger River, they stopped at Forcados (Delta State) Nov. 18. On the government river steamer the S S Kampali, they paddled up the Niger to Lokoja (Nov 25) where Lugard had a temporary administrative centre. The accommodation they had hoped for from the Royal Niger Company did not exist. At the post office, where they looked for any mail, the assistant Post Master, a man from Sierra Leone, knew of their coming and immediately offered them 3 rooms in his house. Banfield said that during their stay of nearly 4 months in his house, "we had some very blessed times, and can recall many happy ours spent among the people there."<sup>23</sup> It was the mercy of God for the 4 helpless strangers to be brought gently into "Africa" by an African, though himself a "stranger" in Lokoja, as so many in the town were.



The Church Missionary Society missionaries in Lokoja also helped the Anthony team search for their own missionary base. Together, they visited the Bassa, Kabba, and other places and people. Banfield, who had excellent photographic equipment with him, was taking the first of what grew to be a valuable collection of thousands of photographs of Africa's people and culture. Banfield and Robinson journeyed with the CMS Rev. J.D. Aitken to visit Anglican mission work in Kabba. They used interpreters to speak in various places but longed to talk directly with those they met. They had already appealed for more workers.<sup>24</sup>

By March of 1902, Anthony, Robinson, Taylor and Banfield decided to begin their mission among the nearby major people group along the Niger, the Nupe. They were given permission by the government to approach the Nupe of Patigi (also spelled Pategi), the first emirate on the south side of the Niger, separate from the larger emirate of Bida. Lugard probably considered the emirate safely under the British and a good place for inexperienced missionaries to begin. It was not the mission's main goal. They wanted to go farther north but facing the situation and restrictions, Anthony's wisdom is probably seen in this decision, which proved to be the first permanent SIM mission base.

Banfield wrote about the landing they made with all their loads on the riverside at Edoji near Patigi:

We did not know where we were going to sleep that night, we could not speak to the people. . . . As soon as the boat had left us, we knelt down under a tree and asked God to direct us in our new life and lead us to a place where we could put our goods and also sleep for the night.<sup>25</sup>

God heard their prayer. The village head of Edoji figured out what these oyinbos wanted right away, and let them use huts to live in and store their loads. Similarly, it was not long before the Etsu of Patigi, Idirisu Gana, understood what SIM team wanted, and provided for 4 grass-walled huts to be made in Patigi itself, about 5 kilometers from the river.<sup>26</sup>

Establishing their mission base took a lot of time, but the team never lost sight of their purpose. As they learned the Nupe language, they began preaching as best they could. After a while they opened a school for literacy in Nupe, using the alphabet Banfield devised. Simple medical help was offered, too.<sup>27</sup>

Banfield may have been the "mechanic" of the mission, but as his fellow missionaries became sick, he had to assume more and more responsibility. He already was in charge of the mission's goods for bartering for supplies. The goods' main use were to pay for the firewood, water, food, building materials and the many other things North Americans found necessary to survive and still do some missionary work.

From the start of their mission to the Nupe, Banfield had begun a rigorous personal quest to "get" the Nupe language. At a time, he admitted it seemed like "trying to distinguish between barks and grunts."<sup>28</sup> He later wrote:

For the first two years I never read a book or paper of any kind in English, except my Bible. I determined to get this language at all costs. I lived in it; I thought in it; I prayed in it; I dreamed in it. So great was my passion to learn it that I even put it before my health and life. At no time, during my years of language work, did I ever have as a teacher a Nupe man who knew a word of English. I struggled for, and hunted out every word I learned. I never forgot a word.<sup>29</sup>

The team welcomed an independent worker, pharmacist Andrew P. Stirrett of Toronto, in November 1902.<sup>30</sup> Anthony had been told to expect him and put him under

probation. His story has been well told in a 1948 biography. In the dry season of 1902-3, the team were constructing larger, square, mud-block houses with wood-frame doors. However, by March 1903, Elder Anthony and Charles Robinson were too sick to keep on, and in April, they left for North America. The records available do not say much about Robinson from this point on, except that Robinson and Anthony resigned from SIM after reaching home. Anthony never fully recovered, and died ten years later.

The Patigi team's efforts had encouraged the mission Council in Toronto to send out 8 more staff in 1903. Banfield was now field superintendent. In October they felt ready to try to establish another mission base at Bida, the largest Nupe settlement, where the CMS from time to time had visited and expected to station their own workers. Banfield conducted the negotiations and supervised the construction of mission buildings in Bida. Albert Taylor led new missionaries, Rev. and Mrs. Charles Homuth, Charles Waddell and Mr W Spinks in the attempt. Sadly, Albert Taylor died in Bida before the end of the year, leaving only Banfield of the original SIM team.<sup>11</sup> That December one couple, Mr. and Mrs. Judd resigned, and went home. Mr. Judd had started helping A W Banfield in administration. Also, in 1904, one man was sent home, sick with tuberculosis, and 3 more resigned! Sick himself with complications of malaria several times in 1904, Banfield was wearing out. Still, the missionaries were praying for the colonial government to lift its ban on missions to the northern people.<sup>12</sup> They traveled around, searching and preaching for openings. In traveling out from Patigi for a month, Banfield reached a town he called Bajibo around New Years Day of 1904. This is certainly Gbajibo, 140 km up-stream on the Niger from Patigi, where there is a UMCA congregation, established 1943. From there he had to rush back to Bida, to care for a colleague sick with fever. In November, Stirrett moved up to Wushishi near Zungeru, where Lugard had moved his administrative centre, to establish the third SIM station. The town was considered a Hausa colony, and at last the mission was in contact with the Hausa directly.<sup>13</sup>

By the end of 1904, Banfield needed relief. He returned to North America with 6 other mission members, reaching Toronto by January 1905, "much broken in health." Stirrett became the field leader in Nigeria.

#### **A New Beginning for Banfield 1905-1915**

Banfield's experiences with the African Industrial Mission in Northern Nigeria deeply stirred him toward the evangelization of the "Sudan". He was weak but not discouraged. He had emerged as a strategist, linguist-translator and administrator in addition to his practical abilities, qualities unsuspected by the mission at first and may be by himself. With hardly a pause, in Canada, Banfield set himself to a number of projects

First, he prepared to marry Althea Priest, from whom he had separated for the sake of Nigeria since September 1901. The wedding took place March 1<sup>st</sup>. According to the practice of the City Mission Workers Society, this meant Ella Banfield had to resign her "dedication" (similar to ordination) as a ministering sister in the Church.

Next, Banfield selected 137 of his best photographs, and with the help of the MBiC magazine editor Henry S Hallman in Berlin, Ontario (now called Kitchener), printed an astounding 5000 copies of a remarkable book called Life Among the Nupe Tribe in West Africa. With each photograph he gave details and stories about life in Nigeria as he saw it, a kind of slide show in book form. Banfield must have kept a diary much of the time,



because often his writing has the sound of fresh memory. If any of his diaries are still existing they would make fascinating reading, and correct a study such as this.<sup>34</sup> The book also has the enthusiasm of a first term missionary who loves the calling and can hardly wait to get back. Banfield appreciated the Africans for their humanity and grew in respect for their culture, even the religious practices that he opposed. In 1907, Banfield published 4 supplementary pages with photographs from the new station he opened in 1905, and they were included in later copies of the book.

Thirdly, Banfield's church district and others like Elder Anthony's in Michigan had been moved by the letters and appeals of the two men. The desire of several of the Conferences to form a denominational mission society seemed to be going ahead. However, one or two districts were reluctant to support a general board. At the 1904 General Conference of the MBiC, permission was given for districts to go ahead and develop a cooperative mission board, but the motion for a full denominational mission was turned down. In the hope that some kind of board would still be formed, A W Banfield resigned from the "Africa Industrial Mission" (SIM). Early in 1905, the Canada Conference (as the Ontario district was called until 1907) noted,

As for the future we have decided, since Bro. Banfield could not feel clear in labouring under the A. I. M., and has therefore resigned from that work, to send him out under the church direct, to open a mission. Sister Banfield will accompany him (D.V.) when he returns to Africa, and we hope and pray that God may send others with them.<sup>35</sup>

A W Banfield was ordained an elder at the district conference, and began touring Conferences with Althea, speaking about Africa. The Missionary society that was formed in 1905 by three MBiC Conference was called the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Missionary Society (General Board), which will be referred to as the MBiCMS or more briefly yet as the Mission. Elder Ebenezer Anthony of Michigan was its first chairman.<sup>36</sup>

The Banfields sailed from North America August 27<sup>th</sup> 1905. At the mouth of the Niger river, as usual, they changed to river steamer. It was not until October that they reached their destination. On this journey, A W Banfield already knew where he wanted to settle for a mission station: the western most of the three Nupe emirates on the south side of the Niger, Tsonga. (It was usually spelled Shonga in mission records).

Tsonga, with a population of about 5,000 in those days, was not unknown to Nigerian missions. The foresighted Anglican bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther had permission from Etsu Umaru Majigi to "occupy" Tsonga in 1876.<sup>37</sup> The town, ruled by a Hausa-Fulani family, was on the direct route of Hausa traders from Sokoto to the south.<sup>38</sup> Crowther was unable to station anyone in Tsonga, but the potential had been noted.

Banfield took with them to Tsonga the parts of a complete wooden house, which he erected on concrete pillars, hoping to keep out termites and other hazards. In Patigi, he had battled the little white ants more than enough times!

At 27 years old, Banfield was superintendent of his Church's first official mission anywhere.<sup>39</sup> His activities over the next ten years set the pattern for the MBiCMS and the UMS for years to come, and to some extent, the UMCA. The fact that the UMCA began the 21<sup>st</sup> century with well over 200 churches in Niger State, and over 100 each in Kwara and Kebbi States, follows from choices and policies agreed to by Banfield and his successor, who served until after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War.

Banfield's priorities, in themselves were not new. Many missions began with compound visitation, language study, mission station development, and search for more mission bases. In 1905, there were only 4 missionary bodies in all of the Northern

Protectorate: the CMS, the SIM, the Sudan United Mission (formed in 1904) and the Mennonites. They all faced similar challenges: vast distances, uncounted numbers of people and languages, unknown cultures. They could have felt as the member of another young mission in East Africa: like "grasshoppers in their own eyes"<sup>30</sup>. They were tiny bands of Christians in a vast non-Christian sea. They did not have the luxury of competing for members with meetings advertised as more "power-packed" than anyone else. There were no other Christians.

A W Banfield soon constructed a building for worship and preaching in Tsonga, but it would not be correct to say this was the first church in the UMCA, because there was no Christian congregation.<sup>31</sup> The first congregation, according to the Mission, was not organized until 1927, in Jebba.<sup>32</sup> Of course, the Mission's definition of a congregation might be questioned. In practice, several ideas of what constitutes a church exist in UMCA today.

In 1906, the calls that Alexander and Althea, Anthony and others had given bore fruit, as two young women, sent by the Michigan and Ontario Conferences, arrived in Nigeria. They were Florence Overholt and Cornelia Pannabecker. Overholt had worked as a City Mission preacher in her district, Ebenezer Anthony gave them tips about life in Nupeland while he guided them to the American port of Boston on their way to Africa. They arrived at Tsonga in September, and plunged into learning Nupe. Banfield was convinced that new missionaries had to learn the Nigerian language of their ministry thoroughly. By December 1906, Banfield had already given them their first exams.<sup>33</sup> Ella Banfield agreed with her husband, "the study of the language is the one important thing for the present, and pray that God will give me a tongue to speak this language. I find the people very kind, ready to receive one at all times."<sup>34</sup>

A few years later, A W Banfield was urging new missionaries to spend up to 8 hours a day for 2 years on language study. Some people thought this was extreme, but missions like the large evangelical China Inland Mission had similar policies.<sup>35</sup>

As the only staff person who could speak Nupe at first, Banfield devoted himself to linguistic work (mainly translation), running the station, and community relations. He encouraged the women to begin visiting compounds and reading the scripture he had already prepared. When the dry season came, he could travel. At the end of 1906, with Althea,

We had the privilege of going on a trip to look out a suitable place for a new station, and I thought to write you a few lines regarding the same. We left Shonga on Tuesday December 11<sup>th</sup>, and after marching eight hours, reached quite a large town called Share. Here we stayed for a day, for I had thought this would make a good site for a mission. The town is on the main caravan route.... We went around the town and then went to consult the chief.... He told me that he would like to let all hear, and would let me know later how the people felt.

Next day we left at 5 a.m., and reached a small village at 2 p.m. As the people of this village are Yoruba or another tribe, we had no thought of location among them. Next day we left at 5 a.m., and after a very hard walk reached the large city of Ilorin.... Here we stayed with the Government Resident for three days, and had a chance to see the city. Mrs. Banfield was the first white lady to enter these cities, and everybody crowded around her to see what a white woman was like....

On our return to Share. The king and head men came to tell me that they had considered what I had said to them, and would be glad if I would return to their town.



Next day, we left and returned to our own city, after being away ten days, and having traveled one hundred and twenty miles on horse-back. I will be glad when we see a mission station in all these centres. May God hasten the time.<sup>48</sup>

As it turned out, the chief of Tsaragi changed his mind; the Mission got permission from his successor in 1916.

In August 1907, two more missionaries arrived, one from Michigan, USA and the other from Ontario, Canada. Ira W Sherk was barely 21 years old; he came from a tropical medicine course in England. Emma Hostetler was an experienced City Mission worker. Sherk opened a simple dispensary and began to get the attention of people in Tsonga with help given. They both worked hard with the Nupe language.

In 1909, Banfield wrote to the Ontario Conference, "the people are beginning to know us better and seem to have more confidence in us. Bro. Sherk is doing quite a bit of medical work and this is giving us a place in their hearts. Our sisters also did a lot of visiting and reading of the Word and we feel sure that God will not let his word fall to the ground in vain."<sup>49</sup>

Banfield turned his attention even more to translation of Nupe scriptures from 1910, and Sherk did more and more of the searching for new mission sites. By 1908, he presented the British and Foreign Bible Society with drafts of the four gospels, and by 1914, a completed New Testament (Not a Bible, as some accounts say).

Banfield and his wife had two girls in these years, but after a few years, as was the practice of all European families in West Africa, they reluctantly left them in their home country. It was not until after the second World War that missions were able to keep children in the country. The Banfields were members of Bethel Chapel, the successor of Toronto West mission. The children stayed with relatives or friends in Toronto. The four northern missions met together in the early days, originally to work together on Nupe literature. Without going into details, one result was that Banfield volunteered to set up and manage a cooperative or "union" printing press at Tsonga. The first machines arrived in December 1910. Although he had never touched a printing press, his "mechanical" skills helped him set up and run an efficient press, the first I believe, in all of Northern Nigeria. Banfield improved the equipment steadily, trained young men to set type and bind books and so on. All the missions using the Niger Press, as Banfield called it, were grateful for the hymnbooks, primers, newsletters, tracts and Bible portions they produced. Banfield said of his assistants, "their work is a marvel to all who have seen it."<sup>50</sup> Banfield was overseer of the press until it was moved to Minna between 1918-1919.

Most supporters of Christian missions, as well as missionaries themselves, prayed for the conversion of the non-Christian people they have in view. This is the command of Jesus, that we make disciples of all nations. Many fine things were done along the way: bodies and emotions healed, babies saved from death and wars stopped, Bibles translated and so on. Sooner or later, everyone hopes to hear of new Christians and churches. The Mennonite mission to the Nupe was hard pressed to produce many conversions. Even in Patigi, as early as 1904, Banfield was saying, "The outlook of the work here at this time seems bright, but one must consider that the people among whom we are working are Mohammedans, and it may take years of labor here before any fruit is seen."<sup>51</sup>

The Canada Conference that year noted, "Bro. Banfield, in Northern Nigeria, West Africa, reports good courage, though the visible results thus far in that work are not

great." Writing to the Conference in 1906, Mrs. Banfield admitted she could not, as she would have as a city mission worker, report a Holiness Convention or revival meetings, or *Gospel Banners* sold, "yet I can report victory in my soul." In 1907, her husband again wrote, from Tsonga,

Regarding the work at present we cannot give any flourishing accounts, save that we are still at our post and trusting God to give us many souls among these people. The popular idea that the heathen are waiting with outstretched arms to receive the gospel is more poetic than true. I have found the heart of man the same out here as at home; "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." This is pioneer work in the purest sense of the word, and the work needs much patience and prayer.<sup>31</sup>

In 1909 the building of the railway from Lagos reached Jebba and work began on the first bridge over the great river. It was not opened until 1916. Jebba had served as a base for S A Crowther, for Lugard and for others. From 1909, all mission traffic could come through Lagos and up the railway to Jebba, instead of journeying up the Niger.

Banfield requested the authorities for land at Jebba and began making cement and mud blocks for some buildings in November 1909. The site was a rocky hill, which the UMCA still occupies with various buildings of later dates. Althea joined her husband when the house was ready, from where she visited and taught while construction continued. A congregation was gathered rather easily from Christians in the construction crews of the railway, though transfers made attenders irregular. With two stations, the game of "transfer the missionary" began: Pannabecker and Overholt moved to Jebba when their furloughs were over, and Sherk went off to England for another medical course. Emma Hostetler took the Banfield's daughter, Althea Mable, to Canada to live with relatives. Mrs Banfield refers to this emptying briefly, "About a year ago there were seven of us living on this station and now there are two of us"<sup>32</sup>.

Hostetler was back in July 1911, accompanied by Rev and Mrs C T. Homuth, who had served with SIM briefly (1903-1904) at Bida. This allowed the Mission to attempt another expansion among the Nupe. The CMS had appointed some people to Mokwa before 1911, but could not maintain a mission base. Graciously, the CMS asked the MBICMS to take over. Mokwa was on the new railway, with about 2,500 people then. A Nigerian co-worker, Mamudu, and his wife Wusa were asked to be the first missionaries and according to Banfield's report to Conference, he did a good work. Mamudu had been with Banfield since 1902. Wusa had been bought out of slavery. The couple continued in Mokwa for about 5 years, while the Mission members came and went.<sup>33</sup> In 1911, Florence Overholt married an SIM missionary, and transferred to the SIM at Kpada.<sup>34</sup> In 1912, the North American mission was distressed by the death of Emma Hostetler to small pox, and her grave is at Tsonga to this day. But finally in 1913, Charles Homuth had the joy of baptizing 22 converts in May, and another 16 in October, the first the Mission could report in 8 years. They were all at Jebba. Also in 1913, Edith Evans, from Ontario, arrived at Jebba.

Our mission often compared itself to the "big brother," SIM, and tried to do the things they did, but the exercise is as fruitless as UMCA comparing itself with ECWA, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By 1915, the SIM had established missions in 13 places among about 8 people groups. Banfield's mission staff was 7 while SIM had dozens. SIM had accepted responsibility for an area already many times larger than that of the Mennonite mission, as did the CMS.

The reasons for the differences are obvious. The Mennonites could draw on their



membership in North America, which numbered a few thousand in scattered rural areas. The CMS had the millions of Anglicans in Britain and her overseas possessions to appeal to. The SIM, as an inter-denominational agency made its appeal through any evangelical church if invited. They were closely associated, in Canada, with a large non-denominational Bible and missionary training school. Rowland Bingham edited a Christian magazine which heavily promoted SIM missions to the general evangelical church of North America; Mennonites, and especially Holiness Mennonites like the MBiC Church were a narrow support base for overseas missions. Their work force never rose above 10% of SIM's.

There was nothing wrong with the missionaries' dedication or devotion to Christ, or amount of prayer or sacrifice in the cause of Christ. They were aware of Satan's devices and countered him in their prayers and teaching constantly. By mission society policies, nearly all began as youth, as we count them in Nigeria, in SIM as well as MBiCMS. The SIM closed a few stations as time went on and had little or no growth in some of them for a long time. Patigi itself had very few Christians for much of the century, though recently as many as 600 Nupe Christians attend the ECWA Church. In contrast, the UMS made the painful decision to appoint no missionaries to Tsonga in 1925. In the late 1990s, converts in the Tsonga area raised hopes for an indigenous church again.

Banfield's influence on his fellow missionaries long after he joined the Bible Society may be traced to some extent. Ira SSherk, who followed Banfield as field superintendent in 1915, continued the policy of thorough study of languages, though it is true most missions operated this way at that time. Sherk himself had a working knowledge of several Niger State languages. Under Sherk, pioneer language and translation study was begun among the Salka Kamberi (1923), Lelna of Zuru (1925), Reshe (Gungawa) 1938 at Yelwa

The presence of the MBiCMS from Tsonga, Jebba and Mokwa northward, meant that the SIM did not expand westward, but rather northward and eastward. The missions met together and agreed to these arrangements. This policy was encouraged by the colonial government, and is called comity. Both missions were northern-focused: one could almost say that Yoruba missions for them were afterthoughts, though abundantly successful as it turned out. These patterns are a legacy from Banfield's leadership. The Anglicans, ECWA and UMCA together have the main Nupe Christian Community today.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps A W Banfield saw the changes to come with the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Nigeria in 1914, and also thought the time had come for a personal change, too. Perhaps he wished to do more for the Church than his Mennonite mission could do. Perhaps he agreed with the letter of Dr J H Ritson of the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), which asked the MBiCMS to release Banfield to become their agent of the African West Coast, that the Bible Society could appoint him to a bigger and more useful field of labour for the Master. What is on record is that when BFBS saw Banfield's skill, dedication and survival in Bible publications, they wanted him.<sup>16</sup> On furlough in 1915, Banfield and his wife were released by the Mission, and they accepted the BFBS call. Another era of fruitful service for Banfield began, but one which is less directly related to the UMCA in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> E. g. E P T Crampton, Christianity in Northern Nigeria (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1979); J B Grimley and G E Robinson, Church Growth in Central and Southern Nigeria (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> E. g. K S Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity Vol 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970) p. 442; Latourette's greatly compressed notes, following J Lowry Maxwell, Nigeria: The Land, The People and Christian Progress (London: World Dominion Press, (1931)), 101-102. Call the mission an American body.

<sup>3</sup> E. g. Ruby Wilson and Olive Evans, Annie Yeo: A Life of Service (Burlington, Canada: Welch, 1985), p. 33 says Banfield took a printing press to Shonga in 1905 (it was 1910) and that he moved his press to Jos in 1915 (SIM moved it from Minna in 1928) or T E Dow, "A W Banfield: Missionary Pioneer in Nigeria" in Reflection Spring 1994 (2:1) 12-15 (a few geographical errors). Eileen Lageer, Merging Streams: Story of the Missionary Church (Elkhart, IN: Bethel, 1979), p. 180 wrongly connects the quotation at the top of the page with the landing at Lokoja (it was Edoji, near Patigi) and says he finished the Nupe Bible in 1914 an oversight for 1929. The final draft was published only in 1953, 4 years after Banfield's death (1949).

<sup>4</sup> AA Banfield, untitled autobiographical note, 1944, in MCIA.

<sup>5</sup> "Candidate's Form" (Africa Industrial Mission) signed May 8 1901. Achieves of SIM International, Charlotte, South Carolina, USA.

<sup>6</sup> Note that "United Missionary Society" became the name of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church missionary society in 1921. 6 years after Banfield joined the British and Foreign Bible Society. Biographical details are taken from JA Huffman, ed., History of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church (New Carlisle, OH: Bethel, 1920) p. 223 and A W Banfield, "A Short History of the Life and Work of A W Banfield," unpublished typescript, ca. 1934, in Missionary Church, Inc. Archives, Bethel College, Mishawaka, IN, (MCIA). I am preparing a biography, of which this paper is a selection.

<sup>7</sup> "A Short History," p. 2

<sup>8</sup> P D Airhart, "The Eclipse of Revivalist Spirituality: the Transformation of Canadian Methodist Piety 1848-1925." PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, 1985.

<sup>9</sup> I use MBiC as an abbreviation because MBC is confused with other denominations in the study of Mennonites. The Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada is not considered a Mennonite church now.

<sup>10</sup> Perfect love, adapted from 1 Jn. 4:18, was John Wesley's way of describing the goal of a heart surrendered to God. He himself was reluctant to claim that he had reached the state of perfect love, but some of his followers were certain they had.

<sup>11</sup> Probably George D Watson, a holiness evangelist from Cincinnati, Ohio, USA.

<sup>12</sup> Rowland Bingham wrote a tract, "The Burden of the Soudan" which touched many at the time.

<sup>13</sup> AA Banfield, unpublished note (MCIA).

<sup>14</sup> There is a family story that A W Banfield was excluded from his family inheritance for a while (Brian Banfield, personal communication).

<sup>15</sup> Yusufu Turaki, An Introduction to the History of SIM/ECWA in Nigeria 1893-1993 (Jos, Nigeria: ECWA, 1993), p. 59. This book is a treasure of information.



<sup>19</sup> J H Hunter, *Flame of Fire: The Life and Work of R V Bingham, D.D.* (Toronto: SIM, 1961), p. 90. Other Biographical details on Anthony from Huffman, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> Curiously, Crampton, who has a lot to say about the CMS C H Robinson, omits naming the SIM C H Robinson, cf p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> Turaki, p. 66-67. A W Banfield, *Life among the Nupe Tribe in West Africa* (Berlin, Canada: H S Hallman, 1905, 1907), p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> cf J H Boer, *Missionary Messengers of Liberation in a Colonial Context: A Case Study of the Sudan United Mission.* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1979), p. 86.

<sup>23</sup> Boer, p. 502, quoted by Bingham, Appendix X.

<sup>24</sup> "A Short History," p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Life Among the Nupe*, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>27</sup> E A Anthony, Letter to Canada Conference, MBiC 1902, written from Lokoja, Jan. 21<sup>st</sup>, 1902. *Proceedings of the Canada Conference 1902*, p. 85-86.

<sup>28</sup> *Life Among the Nupe*, p. 45. Edoji is also spelled Edogi.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* The team built other mud block houses later. Patigi is the only emirate with a Nupe ruling family.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>31</sup> D C Percy, *Stirrett of the Sudan: the Beloved Physician of the Sudan* (Toronto: SIM, 1948), p. 37. Stirrett qualified as a medical doctor during his first furlough.

<sup>32</sup> "A Short History," p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> see note 26.

<sup>34</sup> Turaki, p. 101.

<sup>35</sup> Hunter, p. 83.

<sup>36</sup> Percy, p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> Banfield does mention a dairy in one of his eater articles for the Bible Society. Very likely they are in the British and Foreign Bible Society Archives in Cambridge, UK.

<sup>38</sup> *Proceedings of the Canada Conference, 1905*, p. 89. Outside writers think Banfield started the Nupe mission as a project for the MBiC. It was partly from both districts and himself.

<sup>39</sup> He also returned to being superintendent of the Michigan Conference

<sup>40</sup> E O Babalola, *Christianity in West Africa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Ibadan: Book Representation and Publishing, 1988), p. 131.

<sup>41</sup> An interesting comparison could be made of response to the gospel in Hausa-Fulani ruled towns and indigenously ruled towns.

<sup>42</sup> Eusebius Hershey went to Liberia with the prayers of the MBiC, but on his own in 1890. Many members went to Turkey to assist Armenians suffering from an 1896 massacre, from 1898, and they organized the United Orphanage and Mission Society but it was not an official MBiC mission. William Shantz went to China in 1895, and C F and Sarah Pool Synder in 1897, all under the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

<sup>43</sup> Title from a History of the Africa Inland Mission. cf Numbers 13:37. Instead of fearing like those Israelites, the missions continued to trust.

<sup>44</sup> Contra E R Storms, *What God Hath Wrought: The Story of the Foreign Missionary Efforts of the United Missionary Church* (Springfield, OH: UMS, 1948), p. 33. Storms based his account of Banfield on "A Short History" as did J H Hunter.

- <sup>42</sup> A B Yoder, ed., United Missionary Society Yearbook 1930, p. 40.
- <sup>43</sup> Cornelia Pannabecker, unpublished diaries, courtesy of Mrs E M Chester, Lion's Head, Ontario.
- <sup>44</sup> A A Banfield, Letter to Canada Conference from Shonga, 1906.
- <sup>45</sup> Maxwell, p 87.
- <sup>46</sup> Letter of Feb 1<sup>st</sup> 1907 published in Christian Worker (April 1907), reprinted in Missionary Banner (August 1943), p 5-6.
- <sup>47</sup> Letter of July 27<sup>th</sup> 1909 to Ontario Conference Conference Journal 1909, p. 70.
- <sup>48</sup> Missionary Banner (May 1940), p. 10.
- <sup>49</sup> "A Short History," p. 7.
- <sup>50</sup> Letter to Canada Conference from Bida, Jan 18 1904 and "Report of Foreign Mission Board" (a district board only). Proceedings of the Canada Conference 1904, p 52 and 54 respectively.
- <sup>51</sup> Letter to Canada Conference from Shonga, Dec 27<sup>th</sup> 1906, Proceedings of the Canada Conference 1907, p. 44.
- <sup>52</sup> Letters of A W and A A Banfield from Shonga, Aug 14 and 13, 1910, respectively, Proceedings of the Ontario Conference 1910, p 38-39.
- <sup>53</sup> Summary of Banfield's Letter to Ontario conference in Proceedings of the Ontario Conference 1911, p 31. Mamadu's (or Mamudu) story is mentioned in Life Among the Nupe, especially supplementary pages, p. 82.
- <sup>54</sup> She married F E Lang, whose first wife died at sea, 1907. After Lang's death, she married JH Sherk in the 1940s.
- <sup>55</sup> CAPRO Research Office, Kingdoms at War (Jos, Nigeria: CAPRO Media, 1995), p 264.
- <sup>56</sup> "A Short History," p 7.