

How much do you know about the Rev. Edgar Tufts?

You've probably seen the window in the narthex that went in a few years after his premature death. That portico was built in 1928 so that's no doubt when the stained glass tribute to him was installed.

You may also know that he was the first to preach regularly here, at the little frame church that preceded this stone one, starting already in 1895. He was between his first and second years of seminary and not even ordained yet—we'd have called it a summer internship that brought him for the first time to these mountains. He preached here once a month, from his ordination in 1898 until he died in 1923 at age 52, riding over from Banner Elk, where most of his time was spent. He had a couple of other monthly preaching points. In the early days he made his rounds by horseback in all kinds of weather, later by Ford car.

You may not have known that he had preached here on Christmas Eve Sunday 1922. But the weather had been so cold and windy he had not attempted to drive on the rutted and unimproved roads. He caught a cold from his horseback ride, which turned into pneumonia. He died back home in Banner Elk, on Twelfth Night, January 6, 1923 from complications to his weakened lungs--he had twice suffered from tuberculosis some years earlier, the same disease that killed his mother when he was only 12.

But it was his permanent accomplishments in Banner Elk we must remember best and they are three: the founding of Lees-McRae institute, now Lees McRae college; building Grace Hospital, the first professional medical facility in that community; and establishing Grandfather Home for Children, now part of the Children's Hope Alliance, the project that came to be nearest and dearest to his Blowing Rock congregation.

We might add two more achievements in stone and mortar: building the Banner Elk Presbyterian church, on the Lees-McRae campus, finished 1915; and this beautiful sanctuary, Ruple Memorial, which was completed during his time and no doubt with his blessing, about 1912.

Tufts was small in stature, never physically strong; but he touched the lives of many by word and deed. Perhaps even more than the material structures he should be remembered for the way he ministered to at least four congregations over that quarter century—and visited numerous homes scattered throughout

these so-called Lost Provinces. His daughter, Margaret Tufts Neal, recounts in her book *And Set Aglow A Sacred Flame* several instances where kindnesses and consideration Tufts showed to local folk led them to start attending his church where before they were unchurched. It's hard for us to grasp today how difficult travel would have been, how hard communications were—Tufts initiated and oversaw the introduction of electric power generation in Banner Elk. Even on that fateful Christmas Day ride from Blowing Rock back to Banner Elk in 1922, he had been hailed by a family living a couple miles from home and invited to stay for dinner—this even though “Miss Bessie,” his wife, and his two children, were waiting for him. When Tufts offered a prayer over the meal, the man later recalled that it had been a long time since a prayer of any kind had been offered in the home, and he resolved to “live different from what we had been—and we did.”

Mary Martin Sloop, founder of Crossnore School, whose brother William J. Martin was perhaps most responsible for the building project in which we worship today, attended the funeral service at “Mr. Tufts’s church” that January, 1923. She recalled that people “left the grave praising God for the endless influence of such a life—a life whose secret was unselfish faith; a death whose keynote was victory.”

And now this summer we will have the opportunity to learn more about Mr. Tufts! Dr. Janet Barton Speer, professor emerita of performing arts at Lees McRae and artistic director of Lees-McRae summer theatre, has written the script for a musical “From the Mountaintop” which will be staged July 11-17 in Banner Elk at the Broyhill Theatre of Hayes Auditorium, with music by Thomas Oaks and Tommy Oaks. Some may recall that in 2015 Dr. Speer and her musical collaborators presented “The Denim King: the Moses Cone Story.” This one will build on that success. AND, we will have a song or two from the show presented to us here in worship on Sunday, June 30 at both services. We are looking too at getting a bloc of tickets for a performance of the show. Please see information below.

RSVP soon or at the latest by 5/28 for a Special Treat!

We have the unique opportunity to buy discounted tickets for an always great Lees-McRae Summer Musical! It is "From the Mountaintop, the Edgar Tufts Story." The 2nd chapter of our Dr. Don Saunders' book on Rumble's history is devoted to Tufts. Since the Reverend Tufts was instrumental in the early years of Rumble's development we are the grateful recipients of having much of the cast to participate in our 2 worship services on June 30th. The production was written and is directed by Dr. Janet Barton Speer and was composed by the same team that brought to life "The Denim King, the Moses Cone Story." She will also graciously offer a preparatory powerpoint presentation during the Sunday School hour on June 9.

Our theatre attendance plan is to carpool from Rumble at 12:15 Sunday, July 14, to Banner Elk for securing some of the limited parking spaces before having lunch either at the school cafeteria or nearby restaurant. Since tickets are for reserved seats, we can make the 2:00 matinee. From the Operations Manager at lmc.edu/summertheatre: "One person must pay in one transaction for a minimum of 15 adult tickets to the same performance date in order to receive a \$7 discount per ticket---\$38 standard section, discounted price \$31. I'm holding 17 seats for July 14th at 2 pm performance for your group. Please call me by May 31st to buy the tickets or let me know if you do not need the group tickets."

In case more than the 17 want to go, please make your wishes known as soon as possible for requesting additional seats. At the latest post by 5/28 your checks with self-addressed, stamped envelopes (to receive either your tickets or your returned check if we don't make our quota) to:

"Dr. Barbara Julien, 215 The High Road, Boone, NC 28607."

Thanks from Worship and Fellowship Committees,
and in fond remembrances of "Rumble Rovers" in our church van!