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Montana Folks Couldn't  
Believe He Was a Minister

By Walker Knight

THREE FORKS, Mont. (BP)--Crew cut and most of the time clad in boots, open-necked shirt and a heavy, quilted blue jacket, Roger Hill had a hard time at first convincing the people of this wheat-growing and cattle-ranching town of 1,200 that he was a minister.

More than once he heard the comment: "Surely he hasn't been to the seminary."

But he had been to the seminary, earning a bachelor of divinity degree at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Tex., in 1963.

Since then, he has been "the preacher" at Three Forks Baptist Church. Over the years, he has led a nucleus of church members, which has grown from 15 to 200 and has sponsored three churches in other parts of Montana.

Hill came to the church almost by accident. One evening he stopped by the apartment of a fellow seminarian and on his friend's table were brochures on Montana.

The friend told Hill that a church in Montana wanted him to be their pastor. Hill looked at the photos of the area--Yellowstone National Park and trout fishing--and remarked, "If you don't go, send them my name."

It wasn't long before a call came late one night from a Three Forks layman who told Hill, "We want you to come up here and be our pastor."

The Hills visited the Three Forks congregation--all 15 of them--in late June of 1963, right after his graduation from Southwestern. It was snowing outside when the tiny church voted to call him as pastor. They could hardly support him, but help came through the Northern Plains Baptist Convention and church pastoral aid from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Hill came to a church that was only 10 months old. Rancher Don Johnston had been converted in a church at Helena, met Ferrill and Nancy Rose, both graduates of Baylor University, Waco, Tex., and they decided to start a church at Three Forks.

Ira Sumner, a television weatherman from Billings, 187 miles away, was enlisted to lead the group in worship. One of the first things they did was hold a revival in a VFW Hall. Ten months later they called Roger Hill as their first pastor.

Church growth has been steady but slow. The congregation is representative of the community--schoolteachers, laborers, many ranchers and farmers, and one businessman. Many drive 15-20 miles one way to church. And it's a stable group. Only six have left in the last 12 years.

Hill characterizes them as Bible-believing, self-reliant and independent. He was slow to push the denominational label. "One thing that turns them off quickest is to push Southern Baptists," he says. "But once they learned Southern Baptists are just a channel through which to do the Lord's work, they accepted the denomination."

When Hill, a Yoakum, Tex., native, arrived at Three Forks, the people were ready to build. They had outgrown the lodge hall where services had been held and the jail would no longer take care of the overflow Sunday school classes.

The church had no property, plans or funds. But they were determined. One rancher, Dub Ballard, wasn't even a member yet but designated one of two purebred calves as the church's calf. At the Montana Winter Fair it was a champion and sold for \$1,375. That and Hill's "witnessing" helped convince Ballard he ought to be a church member.

The following April the church started its own building. And less than a year after Hill became pastor, the church was sponsoring its first mission--Jefferson Valley Baptist Church at Whitehall, 30 miles west of Three Forks. Others have followed, including West Yellowstone and the booming Four Corners area. Hill has been a guiding force in each, but, characteristic of his leadership style, his laymen have carried the ball.

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He admits that even in the midst of the success of the church and its outreach, he has sometimes felt frustrated.

"Sometimes you get so low, you just hit the bottom," he says. "People have asked if I ever thought of resigning and I say, 'About 5,000 times a year.' But it's not the area. It would be the same if you were in Corpus Christi or Atlanta.

Hill, among missionaries featured in "Seven Beginnings," a new photo-textbook for the Home Mission Board, has a vision for Montana that he says helps him overcome his frustrations.

"Montana is like Texas was 75 years ago," he says. "It's a huge state with tremendous resources waiting to be developed.

"We are laying a foundation in Montana, and one day it will be a reservoir like that in Texas, Southern Baptists are growing in Montana, he said.

"We're filling a void created by a sterile, formal religion and a liberal theology. People are looking for churches that preach the gospel," Hill concluded.

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers

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Home Mission Board  
Leads BPRA Awards

Baptist Press  
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SARASOTA, Fla. (BP)--Representatives of 19 Southern Baptist national and state organizations, paced by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, collected 58 individual awards from among 207 entries in the annual national awards competition of the Baptist Public Relations Association (BPRA) here.

The Home Mission Board, Atlanta, collected 11 of the awards, while the Brotherhood Commission, Memphis, and the Foreign Mission Board, Richmond, had seven each. Four each went to the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Dallas, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth. Twenty-five other awards were spread among 14 other organizations.

BPRA's major, "best in class" type awards went to Thomas J. Brannon, Baptist General Board of South Carolina, Columbia, first place, total public relations program; Donald S. Hepburn, Southwestern Seminary, first place, total publications program; Tim Fields, Brotherhood Commission, Arthur Davenport Award for public relations project; Walker Knight, Home Mission Board, Frank Burkhalter Award for excellence in religious journalism; and Fon H. Scofield Jr., Foreign Mission Board, M.E. Dodd Memorial Award for the motion picture, Delicate Force.

The Davenport and Dodd awards are presented through BPRA by Arthur Davenport and Associates public relations firm, Oklahoma City, and the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, Fort Worth, respectively.

Top individual winners were Knight, who won six, and David Clanton of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, who had four.

Besides the Burkhalter Award, Knight took a first place in the annual report category, shared two firsts and a second for co-entries with Don Rutledge of the Home Mission Board in photography and shared a co-entered award with Everett Hullum for second place in the magazine category (Home Missions magazine).

Clanton captured two first place awards in photography, a second place in the advertising series category, and shared a second place in the poster category for a co-entry with Lynn Yarbrough and Dan Martin, both of the Baptist General Convention of Texas public relations staff.

Jim Newton of the Brotherhood Commission, Hepburn, Scofield and Rutledge each had three individual awards.

Newton took a first in the news story series category, a second place in news photography and shared a second place for a co-entry with Larry Jerden of the Brotherhood Commission in the feature series category. Rutledge shared three co-entered photography awards with Knight (two firsts and a second.) Besides their major awards, Scofield tied for first in the special publications category and finished first in the motion picture category and Hepburn took a first in newsletters and a second in general information brochures.

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Eight individuals had two awards each: Toby Druin, Home Mission Board, firsts in the news and feature writing; Floyd Craig, Christian Life Commission, Nashville, first for advertising single and tie for first in special publications; John Cobb Smith of Dallas, TimeRite subsidiary of the Radio and Television Commission, first in Radio-TV production and second in advertising single; Hulum, Home Mission Board, first in feature photography single and a shared second for co-entry in the magazine category with Knight; Jerden of the Brotherhood Commission, second in news series category and a shared second for a co-entry with Newton in feature series; Chris Hansen, Baylor University, Waco, Tex., seconds in radio-TV production and news photography series; Richard Styles, Foreign Mission Board, tie for second in feature writing and second in annual report; and Roy Jennings, Brotherhood Commission, seconds in each the development brochure and letterhead categories.

Other single first place finishes went to Norman Bowman, National Student Ministries, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, in magazine category for The Baptist Student; Elaine Selcraig Furlow, Home Mission Board, feature series; Steve Coppock, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, catalog; John Seelig, Southwestern Seminary, development brochure category; Louise Barbour, the Alabama Baptist, Birmingham, general information brochure; Richard Phillips, Florida Baptist Children's Home, Lakeland, letterhead; Terry Snyder, Foreign Mission Board, poster category; W. R. Wagoner, Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, Thomasville, advertising series.

Single individual second place awards also went to Robert O'Brien, Baptist Press, SBC Executive Committee, Nashville, feature writing; W. R. (Bob) Harper, Foreign Mission Board, feature photography single; Marjorie Saunders, Baylor University Medical Center, Dallas, total public relations program; Sarah Rice, Judson College, Marion, Ala., catalog; Craig Bird, South Texas Children's Home, Beeville, newsletter; Clarence Duncan, Radio and Television Commission, special publications; Mike Duduit, Southern Seminary, news story; Larry D. Goddard, Home Mission Board, motion picture.

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Baptists Increase In  
Central America, Caribbean

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptist church members in Central America and the Caribbean Islands now total 207,301, an increase of 8,259 or 4.15 percent over the numbers reported a year ago, the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) announced here.

"A Baptist witness is found in 27 of the 29 jurisdictions in Middle America," a BWA spokesman said. "Figures appear for the first time this year for two places: the newly-independent nation of Grenada, where a Southern Baptist mission has established a small church, and the British colony of the Cayman Islands, where a report of four churches a year ago was received after the statistics had been completed. A Southern Baptist missionary works on the islands.

The two places without a Baptist witness are Montserrat and the Netherlands Antilles, the BWA reported.

Of the 25 jurisdictions on both last year's list and this year's, church membership is up in 15, down in six and unchanged in four. The largest increase in the numbers are in Haiti (plus 4,811) and Puerto Rico (plus 3,629).

A revival occurred in 1975 in Haiti, with the largest Baptist body there, affiliated with a mission of American Baptist Churches, reporting some 2,500 baptisms. In Puerto Rico both the Baptist "convention" (American Baptist related) and the Baptist "association," (Southern Baptist related) have experienced considerable growth.

In the Communist-dominated country of Cuba, there has been an increase of one in the number of churches, but a decline of 744, about five percent, in the number of church members.

The growth in Baptist numbers for Middle America as a whole this year is a reversal of a downward trend of the last several years. In 1973, the numbers reported were 234,579; in 1974, 202,414; and in 1975, 199,042.

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The BWA notes that, still earlier, some larger numbers were reported--for example, 261,985 in 1972--but that in retrospect it appears that in the years prior to 1973, the data for Haiti and Jamaica were erroneously large by about 65,000, probably due to confusion between the numbers of baptized believers and the larger number of the whole "Baptist community."

Baptists in Central America and the Caribbean Islands

<u>Nations:</u>	1976 <sup>a</sup>		1975	
	<u>Churches</u>	<u>Members</u>	<u>Churches</u>	<u>Members</u>
Bahamas	278	25,688	278	25,688
Barbados	6	356	5	167
Costa Rica	54	4,678	50	4,573
Cuba	193	14,180	192	14,924
Dominican Republic	18	1,556	14	2,806
El Salvador	42	3,287	42	3,252
Grenada	1	25	0	0
Guatemala	61	5,278	83	5,836
Haiti	197	82,279	179	77,468
Honduras	107	3,456	82	3,504
Jamaica	367	33,351	380	32,508
Nicaragua	56	4,558	60	5,108
Panama (and Canal Zone)	48	7,199	52	6,905
Trinidad and Tobago	29	2,530	24	2,263
<u>Dependencies:</u>				
Antigua	4	575	2	120
Belize	6	224	7	300
British Virgin Islands	2	120	2	120
Cayman Islands	4	192	0	0
Dominica	4	150	3	83
Guadeloupe	4	91	4	72
Martinique	9	500	9	500
Montserrat	0	0	0	0
Netherlands Antilles	0	0	0	0
Puerto Rico	88	15,079	73	11,450
St. Kitts-Nivis-Anguilla	6	379	4	240
St. Lucia	6	290	5	90
St. Vincent	5	180	4	80
Turks and Caicos Islands	13	900	10	785
U. S. Virgin Islands	8	200	8	200
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1,616</b>	<b>207,301</b>	<b>1,572</b>	<b>199,042</b>

<sup>a</sup>Subject to change

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BPRA Elects  
Nash to Presidency

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SARASOTA, Fla. (BP)--Stanton H. Nash, assistant to the president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif., was elected national president of the Baptist Public Relations Association (BPRA) during the Southern Baptist group's annual meeting here.

Nash succeeds Roy Jennings, executive assistant, Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, Memphis.

Other officers for 1976-77 are James H. Cox Sr., associate editor, Western Recorder, Middletown, Ky., program vice president; M. Judson Cook, director of public relations, department of child care, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, membership vice president; Evelyn Strickland, public relations coordinator, Tennessee Baptist Convention, Brentwood, secretary-treasurer; and Jennifer K. Bryon, communications specialist, Book Store Division, Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Inter-agency Council representative.

The BPRA is made up of 234 members from churches, associations and national and state Southern Baptist organizations from California to Virginia. -30-

(A photo mailed to Baptist state papers.)