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# Methodist circuit-riders in America, 1766-1844

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METHODIST CIRCUIT-RIDERS IN AMERICA, 1766-1844

BY

WILLIAM A. POWELL, JR.

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## PREFACE

The Methodist Episcopal Church became the largest religious denomination in the United States during the 1820's. Local expressions of the national body were established in nearly every American community. Methodist expansion was largely a result of the activity of circuit-riders. These itinerants traveled and proclaimed the gospel to citizens, many of whom joined the Church and became part of a religious movement which influenced the development of culture in the United States.

The traveling minister in the Methodist Church was noted for his self-sacrificing spirit. He endured hardships in the ministry which few men of the present age can fathom. Richard Hofstadter, the widely respected American historian, once stated, "The bulwark and the pride of the early American Methodists were the famous circuit-riding preachers who made up in mobility, flexibility, courage, hard work, and dedication what they might lack in ministerial training or dignity. These itinerants," he continued, "were justly proud of the strenuous sacrifices they made to bring the gospel to the people." <sup>1</sup> But these sacrifices cost a precious price.

Five hundred of the first six hundred and fifty Methodist circuit-riders retired prematurely from the ministry. Nearly one fourth of the first eight hundred ministers who died were

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1. Richard Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism in American Life (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 96.

under the age of thirty five. Over one hundred and twenty-five itinerants were between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five when they died; and over half of the eight hundred died before they reached thirty! About two hundred traveling preachers died within the first five years of their entrance into the ministry and nearly two thirds died before they had preached twelve years.<sup>2</sup> The life style of the early Methodist traveling preacher perished in the United States with the settlement and growth of the nation; however, his dedication is an inspiration to every generation.

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2. Elmer T. Clark, Album of Methodist History (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), p. 107.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE INTRODUCTION, EXPANSION AND INFLUENCE OF METHODISM IN AMERICA, 1766-1844

Methodism began in England during the late 1730's under the direction of John Wesley. Pietism and evangelical Christianity influenced the rise of this British revival in the established church.<sup>1</sup> But, neither John Wesley nor his English followers planned for their religious society's transport to the American colonies.<sup>2</sup> In the early 1760's Methodist lay preachers traveled to the colonies. These British immigrants were not motivated by religious desires when they came to the New World, but merely sought to improve their economic welfare. However, Methodist laymen founded the first societies in America.<sup>3</sup>

Robert Strawbridge (177-1781), an Irish immigrant, formed the first Methodist societies in both Maryland and

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1. For English Methodist beginnings and the role of John Wesley see, Luke Tyerman, The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Founder of the Methodists, 3 Vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1872-79).

2. See Stuart C. Henry, "Early Contacts in America," in Emory Stevens Bucke, editor, The History of American Methodism, 3 Vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), I, pp. 43-73.

3. The most exhaustive treatment of Methodist beginnings is John Lednum, A History of the Rise of Methodism in America, (Philadelphia: Published by the Author, 1859). But the best work is William Warren Sweet, Men of Zeal; The Romance of American Methodist Beginnings (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1935). Helpful insights may also be found in Frank Baker, "The Beginnings of American Methodism," Methodist History, 2 (October, 1963), pp. 1-15; J. Manning Potts, "Methodism in Colonial America," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 74-95.



Virginia in the 1760's. Strawbridge had been a local preacher in Ireland, but came to the New World when he experienced financial difficulty.<sup>4</sup> Phillip Embury (1728-1773), also a local preacher in Ireland, entered New York city in the late 1750's and taught school. Embury assembled five colonists in September, 1766 and preached regularly.<sup>5</sup> Thomas Webb (1724-1796), a British Army officer stationed in the colonies, was informed of Methodist gatherings in New York and came to the city in 1767. The English Captain had been a local preacher in Britain and now proclaimed the gospel with Embury. Webb also traveled and preached in Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey.<sup>6</sup>

The New York society informed John Wesley in April, 1768 of American Methodist activities. Colonial members requested that the English religious leader provide more experienced

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4. For the career of Robert Strawbridge see, Frederick E. Maser, "Robert Strawbridge, Founder of Methodism in Maryland," Methodist History, 4 (January, 1966), pp. 3-21; I. G. Porter, "Robert Strawbridge and American Methodism," Methodist Review, 111 (May, 1928), pp. 371-81; Sweet, Men of Zeal, pp. 71-79. See also, Frederick E. Maser, editor, "New Light on Robert Strawbridge," Methodist History, 10 (April, 1971), pp. 62-64.

5. Phillip Embury's ministry is the subject of Samuel J. Fanning, "Phillip Embury, Founder of Methodism in New York," Methodist History, 3 (January, 1965), pp. 16-25; Sweet, Men of Zeal, pp. 53-63.

6. Captain Thomas Webb's work is summarized in Frank Baker, "Captain Thomas Webb, Pioneer of American Methodism," Religion in Life, 34 (Summer, 1965), pp. 406-21; Sweet, Men of Zeal, pp. 63-71. See also, Arthur Bruce Moss, editor, "Two Thomas Webb Letters at Drew University," Methodist History, 13 (October, 1974), pp. 52-56.

leadership for their expanding group.<sup>7</sup> Although Wesley had not initiated the development of Methodism in the colonies, he welcomed the news of its success in New York. At the British Leeds Conference of 1769 the Methodist founder called for volunteers to aid believers in the "wilderness of America." "I mentioned the case of our brethren in New York," Wesley wrote, "who had built the first Methodist preaching-house<sup>8</sup> in America, and were in great want of. . .preachers." Richard Boardman (1738-1782) and Joseph Pilmore (1739-1825) volunteered and became the first sanctioned representatives of Methodism in America.<sup>9</sup> They were in fact missionaries to the colonies.<sup>10</sup> Boardman and Pilmore arrived in Philadelphia

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7. This letter and a discussion of its contents is found in Frank Baker, "Early American Methodism: A Key Document," Methodist History, 3 (January, 1965), pp. 3-15.

8. Quoted in Potts, "Methodism in Colonial America," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 80-81.

9. Early authors referred to the minister as Pilmoor, but this writer uses the generally accepted spelling. Joseph Pilmore left a journal which recently has been published, The Journal of Joseph Pilmore, Methodist Itinerant, for the Years August 1, 1769 to January 2, 1774, edited by Frederick E. Maser and Havard T. Maag (Philadelphia; Printed by Message Publishing Co. for the Historical Society of the Philadelphia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, 1969). Also consult, Frederick E. Maser, editor, "A Revealing Letter from Joseph Pilmore," Methodist History, 10 (April, 1972), pp. 54-58. Both Boardman and Pilmore are treated in Sweet, Men of Zeal, pp. 85-109. An old work is John P. Lockwood, The Western Pioneers; or, Memorials of the Lives and Labours of the Rev. Richard Boardman and the Rev. Joseph Pilmore (London; Wesleyan Conference Office, 1881).

10. In a recent work Frederick A. Norwood stated, "The history of American Methodism, at least down to 1784, is nothing but the history of missionary enterprize." The Story of American Methodism: A History of the United Methodists and Their Relations (New York; Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 70.

during October, 1769 and preached extensively in that city  
 11  
 and also in New York.

British leadership was an important factor in the development of colonial Methodism. The missionary preachers founded many new societies and for this purpose the English Conference sent additional ministers to American shores. Robert Williams (1745-1775), the pioneer of Methodism in southern Virginia, came in 1769 and was followed by John King (1746-  
 12  
 1795) who preached in Maryland and North Carolina. In 1771 the Conference sent Francis Asbury (1745-1816) and Richard Wright (177-?) to America. Although unknown at this time, Asbury became the American leader of the Methodist  
 13  
 movement for over forty years. "Whither am I going," he

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11. Pilmore, Journal, pp. 1-33.

12. These men were not sanctioned by the British Conference. For Robert William's ministry consult, William Crook, Ireland and the Centenary of American Methodism (London; Hamilton, Adams and Company, 1866), pp. - ; Sweet, Men of Zeal, pp. 79-83. John King is the subject of Edward Hill Davis, "John King; Pioneer, Physician, Preacher, Patriot," Methodist Quarterly Review, 77 (July, 1928), pp. 435-48; Sweet, Men of Zeal, pp. 82-84.

13. The life of Francis Asbury has been the subject of numerous authors. The most important secondary work is L. C. Rudolph, Francis Asbury (New York; Abingdon Press, 1966). But, Ezra Squier Tipple, Francis Asbury; the Prophet of the Long Road (New York; The Methodist Book Concern, 1916) is also important. Other writings include; William P. Strickland, The Pioneer Bishop; or, the Life and Times of Francis Asbury (New York; Carlton & Porter, 1858); Edwin L. Janes, The Character and Career of Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America (Nashville; Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1896); George P. Mains, Francis Asbury (New York; Eaton & Mains, 1906); Horace M. Du Bose, Francis Asbury; A Biographical Study. (Nashville, Tenn.; Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916); Henry King Carroll, Francis Asbury in the Making of American Methodism (New York;

asked when leaving England? "To the New World. What to do? To gain honour? No, if I know my own heart. To get money? No; I am going to live to God, and to bring others so to do . . . If God does not acknowledge me in America, I will soon return to England." <sup>14</sup> But, Asbury never again saw the shores of his native land.

Thomas Rankin (1736-1810) and George Shadford (1739-1816) came in 1773. Wesley appointed Rankin as Assistant to oversee the activities of British preachers in America. Rankin continued at this post until 1777. Shadford led a remarkable revival near Petersburg, Virginia in 1776. <sup>15</sup>

James Dempster (177-1803) and Martin Rodda (177-?), the final pair of British missionaries, arrived in 1774 but

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Methodist Book Concern, 1923); Herbert Asbury, A Methodist Saint: The Life of Bishop Asbury (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927); William Larken Duren, Francis Asbury; Founder of American Methodism and Unofficial Minister of State (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1928). Periodical articles also abound, but are of unequal value. See Charles Henry Prather, "Francis Asbury, Apostle," Methodist Quarterly Review, 65 (April, 1916), pp. 323-33; James Richard Joy, "Francis Asbury; A Founder of the American Nation," Methodist Review, 28 (January, 1922), pp. 70-76. The most important source however is the published journal of Francis Asbury, The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury, 3 Vols., edited by Elmer T. Clark (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958). Richard Wright's work is in Sweet, Men of Zeal, pp. 109-11.

14. Asbury, Journal, 1 (September 12, 1771), pp. 4-5.

15. Joseph Yearby (177-?), an unappointed volunteer, accompanied the British Methodists. Rankin's autobiography appears in Thomas Jackson, The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers, Chiefly Written by Themselves, 4th edition, Vol. V (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1873), pp. 135-217. See also, Sweet, Men of Zeal, pp. 112-15. Shadford's autobiography is found in Jackson, Early Preachers, Vol. VI, pp. 136-81. See also, Sweet, Men of Zeal, pp. 112-16.

made few contributions before they returned to England. 16

Early American Methodism was patterned after its English counterpart. John Wesley instructed British preachers to enforce Methodist practice in colonial societies. The English religious leader exhorted both Rankin and Asbury to teach and defend British Methodist rule. 17  
The missionaries' response is revealed in the actions of the first American annual conference, held at Philadelphia in 1773. The minutes recorded the following: "Ought not the doctrine and Discipline of the Methodists, . . . be the sole rule of our conduct, who labor in the connection with Mr. Wesley in America?" 18 The answer was unanimous as the conference confirmed the English leader's authority over all American societies.

In most instances colonial believers conformed to British Methodist standards. The movement remained within the Anglican Church during the Revolutionary period. 19 John

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16. William Glendenning (177?-?) came on his own responsibility with these Methodists. Professor Sweet writes, "Martin Rodda did more harm . . . than good," because he meddled in the political affairs of America. Dempster's stay was "too short to render any service of lasting importance." Sweet, Men of Zeal, pp. 94, 117.

17. Strawbridge, Pilmore and Boardman refused to administer strict discipline. This action alarmed Wesley. Arthur Bruce Moss, "Methodism in Colonial America," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 120-29.

18. Minutes of the Annually Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1773-1828, Vol. I (New York: Published by T. Mason & Lane, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1840), p. 5.

19. Methodists in Norfolk County, Virginia urged the ordination of one Methodist minister. Joan Rezner Gundersen, "A Petition of Early Norfolk County, Virginia, Methodists to the Bishop of London; Urging the Ordination of Joseph Pilmore,"

Wesley adopted the itinerancy in Britain and the English ministers imitated this example. Colonial regions were organized into circuits where Methodists traveled and formed new groups.<sup>20</sup> The Discipline, a guide for Methodist religious conduct, was effectively enforced. Francis Asbury and Thomas Rankin were both concerned with the development of Methodism in the colonies. "Without discipline," Asbury wrote, "we should soon be as a rope of sand; . . . it must be enforced<sup>21</sup> let who will be displeased."

The religious movement expanded during the 1770's. The minutes of 1773 recorded only ten preachers and 1,160 members in society; but by 1776, there were twenty-four ministers and 4,921 constituents.<sup>22</sup> Maryland and Virginia were

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Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, 83 (October, 1975), pp. 412-21. For other Anglican-Methodist activity see, William Warren Sweet, "New Light on the Relation of Early American Methodism to the Anglican Clergy in Virginia and North Carolina," Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 22 (March, 1953), pp. 69-90; Robert C. Monk, "Unity and Diversity Among Eighteenth Century Colonial Anglicans and Methodists," Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 38 (March, 1969), pp. 51-69; Moss, "Methodism," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 129-44.

20. See the actions of the first annual conference in this regard, Minutes of the Annually Conferences, 1773, p. I, 5. For Wesley's itinerant practices consult, Tyerman, John Wesley, passim. The practice was eventually modified in America. Frederick A. Norwood, "The Americanization of the Wesleyan Itinerant," in Gerald O. McCulloh, editor, The Ministry in the Methodist Heritage (Nashville: Department of Ministerial Education, Division of Educational Institution, Board of Education Methodist Church, 1966), pp.

21. Asbury, Journal, 1 (July 29, 1775), p. 159. See also, 1 (May 29, July 11, July 14, August 5, October 13, 1775), pp. 157, 160, 161, 165.

22. Minutes of the Annually Conferences, 1773, 1776, I, pp. 5, 7.

the strongholds of Methodism in America. The denomination's growth was outstanding on the Brunswick circuit in southern Virginia, where Devereux Jarratt (1733-1801), an Anglican parson, aided Wesley's preachers. During the winter of 1775-1776 "the Spirit of the Lord was poured out in a manner we had not seen before," the clergyman wrote.<sup>23</sup> This revival added almost one thousand men and women to Methodist societies in southern Virginia. However, the growth in this area was atypical and Methodists were only a small religious movement within the Anglican Church by the end of the colonial period.

The Methodist movement in North America was altered during the Revolution. When the conflict commenced, John Wesley printed a pamphlet entitled, "A Calm Address to the American Colonies."<sup>24</sup> This tract justified the English government and condemned the actions of colonists. American Methodists, under Wesley's direction, were advised to "say

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23. For these states consult, Ibid., 1776, pp. I, 7. The Anglican parson wrote an autobiography, The Life of the Reverend Devereux Jarratt, Rector of Bath Parish, Dinwiddie County, Virginia (Baltimore; Printed by Warner and Hanna, 1806). Additional comments are found in E. Clowes Chorley, "The Reverend Devereux Jarratt, 1732-1801," Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 5 (March, 1936), pp. 47-64; Harry G. Rabe, "The Reverend Devereux Jarratt and the Virginia Social Order," Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 33 (December, 1964), pp. 299-336; Gewehr, Great Awakening, pp. 138-66. An account of the revival appears in Asbury, Journal, 1, pp. 207-24.

24. The pamphlet was printed in 1775. For a discussion of its contents consult, William Warren Sweet, "John Wesley, Tory," Methodist Quarterly Review, 71 (April, 1922), pp. 255-68; Frank Baker, "The Shaping of Wesley's Calm Address," Methodist History, 14 (October, 1975), pp. 3-12; Donald H. Kirkham, "John Wesley's Calm Address: The Response of the Critics," Methodist History, 14 (October, 1975), pp. 13-23.

not one word against one or the other side." <sup>25</sup> But, Wesley's pamphlet gave his colonial followers an image of Toryism. Patriots associated members of the denomination with Wesley's political views and in some instances questioned Methodist religious motives. Asbury faced this situation and said, "I . . . am truly sorry that the venerable man ever dipped into the politics of America. . . . Some inconsiderate persons have taken occasion to censure the Methodists . . . on account of Mr. Wesley's political sentiments." <sup>26</sup> Thomas Rankin, George Shadford and the other English preachers returned to Great Britain before 1778. Asbury alone remained but was forced into exile in Delaware where the test oath was not mandatory for clergy. <sup>27</sup>

Methodism was Americanized when native ministers became influential leaders. William Watters (1751-1833), Phillip Gatch (1751-1834), Freeborn Garrettson (1752-1827), Jesse Lee (1758-1816) and others became prominent American

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25. John Wesley to Thomas Rankin, March 1, 1775, in John J. Tigert, A Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1904), p. 80. Also see, Willard M. Wallace, "John Wesley and the American Revolution," in Norton Downs, editor, Essays in Honor of Conyers Read (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 52-64; Lynwood M. Holland, "John Wesley and the American Revolution," Journal of Church and State, 5 (November, 1963), pp. 199-213.

26. Asbury, Journal, 1 (March 19, 1776), p. 181.

27. For the departure of the British preachers see, Sweet, Men of Zeal, pp. 115-18. Asbury stated, "I had before resolved not to depart from the work on any consideration." Journal, 1 (January 21, 1777), p. 228. For the exile consult, Journal, 1 (January 8, 1778 - April 20; 1780), pp. 262-345; James W. May, "Francis Asbury and Thomas White: A Refugee Preacher and His Tory Patron," Methodist History, 14 (April, 1976), pp. 141-64.



Methodist preachers. Professor William Warren Sweet called the English missionaries' departure "a fortunate happening for the future of American Methodism." The denomination relied on native ministry early in its development. This was one important factor which contributed to Methodist expansion in the United States.

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28. A general treatment of the native preachers in this important decade is Norman W. Spellman, "The Early Native Methodist Preachers," Duke Divinity School Review, 34 (Autumn, 1969), pp. 163-87. William Watters left an autobiography, A Short Account of the Christian Experience, and Ministerial Labours, of William Watters (Alexandria: Printed by S. Snowden, 1806). Also consult, D. A. Watters, First American Itinerant for Methodism, William Watters (Cincinnati: Printed for the Author, by Curtis and Jennings, 1898); C. H. Cockran, "A Neglected Hero of the Cross - William Watters," Methodist Review, 111 (May, 1928), pp. 382-87. For the work of Phillip Gatch consult, John McLean, Sketch of Rev. Phillip Gatch (Cincinnati: Published by Swormstedt & Poe, 1854); Elizabeth Connor, Methodist Trail Blazer; Phillip Gatch, 1751-1834 (Cincinnati: Creative Publishers, Inc., 1970); Paul Henshaw Boase, "Phillip Gatch," Bulletin of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio, 13 (October, 1955), pp. 286-96. The ministry of Garrettson is treated in a number of works including his journal, The Experience and Travels of Mr. Freeborn Garrettson (Philadelphia: Printed by Parry Hall, published by John Dickens, 1791); Nathan Bangs, The Life of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson; Compiled from his Printed and Manuscript Journals, and Other Authentic Documents (New York: Published by J. Emory & B. Waugh, 1832); Ezra A. Tipple, Freeborn Garrettson (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1910). Jesse Lee is the subject of Minton Thrift, Memoir of the Rev. Jesse Lee; With Extracts from His Journals (New York: Published by N. Bangs and T. Mason, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1823); Leroy M. Lee, The Life and Times of the Rev. Jesse Lee (Richmond, Va.: By John Early, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1848); William Henry Meredith, Jesse Lee, a Methodist Apostle (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1909).

29. Sweet, Men of Zeal, p. 119. The following articles treat the influence of the Revolution and the rise of native preachers as a phase of the Americanization process; Douglas R. Chandler, "Towards the Americanizing of Methodism," Methodist History, 13 (October, 1974), pp. 3-16; Frank Baker, "The Americanizing of Methodism," Methodist History, 13 (April, 1975), pp. 5-20. Also consult, Coen G. Pierson, "Methodism

Religious societies were disrupted where actual combat occurred. The annual conference failed to send itinerants to the Norfolk circuit in southeastern Virginia from 1778 to 1782. No Methodist minister could preach effectively in the war-stricken area.<sup>30</sup> Many members volunteered or were drafted into the militia and some died in battle. Others were influenced by non-Methodists and lost religious zeal.<sup>31</sup> One group became "bound in conscience not to fight" and condemned violence on moral grounds.<sup>32</sup> But, American patriots often misinterpreted the religious motivations of conscientious objectors and labeled them Tories. Freeborn Garrettson was assailed by mobs, beaten into unconsciousness and jailed on suspicion of being a British spy.<sup>33</sup> Many Methodists encountered some form of persecution. However, adversity aided the religious group in several ways. The conflict separated dedicated members from those who were less serious. The religious convictions of many Methodists were strengthened

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in the Revolution," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 145-84.

30. The minutes from the years 1778 to 1782 do not list a preacher for the Norfolk circuit. See Minutes of the Annually Conferences, 1778-1782. For the activity of troops in this region consult, Lester J. Cappon, editor-in-chief, Atlas of Early American History: The Revolutionary Era, 1760-1790 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 44-51.

31. Jesse Lee, A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810), p. 77. This book is a primary source since the author lived during the period and was acquainted with the participants.

32. Ibid., pp. 77-78.

33. Until freed by Maryland authorities, Garrettson preached from his cell to crowds who gathered at the prison. Pierson, "Methodism in the Revolution," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 164-69.

when they suffered for their faith.<sup>34</sup>

The Revolution strained the relationship between American Methodists and the Anglican Church. In Britain, Methodism was a lay movement within the established Church. Preachers evangelized at will in England and in the colonies, but only ordained clergy possessed authority to baptize and administer the Lord's supper. Many Anglican parsons returned to England during the war and American Methodists were in many instances not able to receive the sacraments. A controversy concerning their administration arose among the societies.<sup>35</sup> An independent spirit influenced the judgements and actions of a number of native preachers. One group of Methodists met in Virginia during 1779 and attempted to solve the problem of the sacraments. This body appointed a presbytery of five ministers each of whom possessed authority to baptize and administer the Lord's supper. The presbytery based its authority on lay support.<sup>36</sup> The following year another group of preachers gathered in Baltimore under the direction of Francis

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34. Consult, Pierson, ibid., p. 168. But also see the comments of Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, p. 77.

35. Pierson, "Methodism in the Revolution," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 176-78. William Warren Sweet, Methodism in American History (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933), pp. 93-95. Paul S. Sanders, "The Sacraments in Early American Methodism," Church History, 26 (December, 1957), pp. 355-71.

36. The Virginia faction was led by Phillip Gatch. One of the best studies of the controversy is an old work, William W. Bennett, Memorials of Methodism in Virginia: From Its Introduction Into the State in the Year 1772, to the Year 1829 (Richmond; Published by the Author, 1871), pp. 104-08. Also see, Pierson, "Methodism in the Revolution," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 176-80.

Asbury. They affirmed their loyalty to John Wesley and also rejected the actions of the Virginia faction.<sup>37</sup> The Baltimore conference sent Asbury to Virginia in April, 1780 to offer terms for reconciliation. The Methodist leaders required that the Virginia group "suspend all their administrations for one year" until a conference convened in Baltimore to determine the issue. The southerners initially rejected Asbury's plea, but eventually surrendered for the sake of unity.<sup>38</sup> The Methodist leader traveled widely in Virginia and North Carolina in order to heal the schism.<sup>39</sup> The issue of the sacraments, however, was not fully resolved until 1784.

Finally, the Revolution severed all political and ecclesiastical ties that had existed between England and her colonies. The idea of religious liberty developed in the minds of many Americans during the conflict.<sup>40</sup> These

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37. Asbury, Journal, 1 (April 25-27, 1780), pp. 346-47; Minutes of the Annually Conferences, 1780, I, pp. 11-12; Watters, Ministerial Labours, pp. 79-80.

38. Asbury, Journal, 1 (April 25-27, 1780), pp. 346-47; Minutes of the Annually Conferences, 1780, I, pp. 12-13; The meeting with the Virginia faction is found in Asbury, Journal, 1 (May 3-10, 1780), pp. 348-50.

39. *Ibid.*, (May 11 to October 29, 1780), pp. 350-85. The Methodist leader encountered opposition to the compromise from some local preachers, (January 1, April 16, 1782), pp. 417, 424.

40. See Sidney E. Mead, "American Protestantism During the Revolutionary Epoch," Church History, 22 (December, 1953), pp. 279-97; and "From Coercion to Persuasion; Another Look at the Rise of Religious Liberty and the Emergence of Denominationalism," Church History, 25 (December, 1956), pp. 317-37.

developments terminated the relationship between the Anglican Church and governments in the new nation. The Anglicans had become increasingly unpopular during the war when many Church leaders and members remained in the loyalist camp. John Wesley was aware of the influence of this situation on American Methodism. The controversy over the administration of the sacraments accented his concern. Many Methodists in the new nation looked to the English leader for guidance.<sup>41</sup> Wesley remedied the situation when he established a separate Church in the United States. In a letter addressed to "Our Brethren in America," Wesley wrote:

The case is widely different between England and North America . . . In America . . . for some hundred miles together there is none either to baptize or to administer the Lord's supper . . . I have accordingly appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Asbury to be Joint Superintendents over our brethren in North America . . . As our American brethren are now totally disentangled both from State and from the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church.<sup>42</sup>

The British leader sent a committee to America in September, 1784 under the direction of Dr. Thomas Coke (1747-1814) to inform Methodists in the new nation of his proposal.<sup>43</sup>

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41. Francis Asbury to John Wesley, March 20, 1784, in Asbury, Letters, 3, pp. 32-34.

42. John Wesley to Our Brethren in America, September, 1784, in John Telford, editor, The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.: Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, Vol. VII (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), pp. 237-39.

43. Thomas Vasey (1742-1826) and Richard Whatcoat (1736-1806) were members of the committee. Both were British ministers. Norman W. Spellman, "The Formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 201-11.

The committee arrived in early November and met Asbury at Barratt's Chapel in Maryland. Asbury, however, was "shocked when first informed" of the content of Wesley's letter. He called an assembly of American Methodist ministers to discuss the plan and sent Dr. Coke on a journey to familiarize him with societies in the United States. <sup>44</sup> The Christmas Conference, as it was later termed, convened on December 24, 1784 in the city of Baltimore and American Methodists adopted Wesley's proposal with few dissents. The ministers called the new organization the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. <sup>45</sup> Asbury and Coke were elected

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Thomas Coke left a journal, Extracts of the Journals of the Rev. Dr. Coke's Five Visits to America (London: Printed by G. Paramore, 1793). The most important secondary work is John A. Vickers, Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism (New York: Abingdon Press, 1969). But also consult, Johnathan Crowther, The Life of the Rev. Thomas Coke (Leeds: Alexander Cumming, 1815); Samuel Drew, The Life of the Rev. Thomas Coke, LL.D. (New York: J. Soule & T. Mason, 1818); John Wesley Etheridge, The Life of the Rev. Thomas Coke, D.C.L. (London: John Mason, 1860); Warren Akin Candler, Life of Thomas Coke, (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1923). Important articles are John A. Vickers, "Thomas Coke (1747-1814)--His Personal Background," Methodist History, 4 (January, 1966), pp. 29-40; "The Churchmanship of Thomas Coke," Methodist History, 7 (July, 1969), pp. 15-28.

44. Coke, Journals, pp. 15-22; Asbury Journal, 1 (November, 1784), pp. 471-72.

45. For published primary sources on the Christmas Conference see, Asbury, Journal, 1 (December 18, 1784 to January 3, 1785), pp. 473-79; Coke, Journals, pp. Thomas Ware, Sketches of the Life and Travels of the Rev. Thomas Ware (New York: Published by T. Mason & G. Lane, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1839). There are many good secondary sources. The following all provide helpful insights: Spellman, "The Formation," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 213-32; Norwood, Story of American Methodism, pp. 98-102; James M. Buckley, Constitutional and Parliamentary History

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and ordained Bishops in the new Church. The Methodists, one of the smallest religious groups in the United States, were first to establish a national institutional Church. This was a factor which contributed to Methodism's rapid development during the early national period.

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The American Methodist Church greatly expanded during the late eighteenth century. In 1783 Methodism remained numerically strongest in the states of Maryland and Virginia; but, the denomination spread throughout the nation in the 1780's. Circuit-preachers formed many new churches and by the early 1800's Methodism was established in most American

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of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York; Eaton & Mains, 1912), pp. 47-50; Sweet, Men of Zeal, pp. 98-102; Tigert, American Episcopal Methodism, pp. 180-207. Significant articles are Nathaniel Cheans Hughes, Jr., "The Methodist Christmas Conference; Baltimore, December 24, 1784-January 2, 1785," Maryland Historical Magazine, 54 (September, 1959), pp. 272-92; Warren Thomas Smith, "The Christmas Conference," Methodist History, 6 (July, 1968), pp. 3-27. Wesley was now revered as the father of Methodism by American members and was consulted as an adviser on important issues, but the British leader no longer exercised direct authority in the United States. This was not Wesley's intention in founding the denomination. The English leader believed he could rule the Church through the appointment of "Overseers". But American Methodist preachers did not grant him this power and elected their own Bishops. A separation occurred between European and American Methodism. Buckley, Constitutional and Parliamentary History, p. 57.

46. See Arthur Bruce Moss, "The Ordination of Francis Asbury," Methodist History 1 (April, 1963), pp. 25-28; "Asbury's First Years as Bishop," A.M.E. Zion Quarterly Review, 64 (Spring, 1953), pp. 99-102; John A. Vickers, "Coke and Asbury; A Comparison of Bishops," Methodist History, 11 (October, 1972), pp. 42-51; Emora T. Brannan, "Episcopal Overtures to Coke and Asbury during the Christmas Conference, 1784," Methodist History, 14 (April, 1976), pp. 203-12.

47. Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 100.

communities. Membership of the denomination increased from 13,740 in 1783 to 214,307 in 1813.<sup>48</sup>

The Church entered southern regions in the 1780's. Joseph Pilmore preached in South Carolina as early as 1773, but did not organize a society. Francis Asbury came to the state in 1785 and formed the first circuit. The annual conference sent ministers to the area that year and membership grew from only fifty-eight citizens in 1786 to over 4,500 in 1800.<sup>49</sup> When he first visited Charleston, Asbury

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48. For Methodist work in the states of Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, Delaware and New Jersey consult: William W. Sweet, Virginia Methodism; A History (Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 1955); Bennett, Methodism in Virginia; Matthew H. Moore, Sketches of the Pioneers of Methodism in North Carolina and Virginia (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1884); Gordon Pratt Baker, editor, Those Incredible Methodists: A History of the Baltimore Conference of the United Methodist Church (Baltimore, Commission on Archives and History of the Baltimore Conference, 1972); Ernest C. Hallman, The Garden of Methodism (N.p.: Published at the Request of the Peninsula Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1948); Norris S. Barrett, Barratt's Chapel and Methodism (Wilmington: The Historical Society of Delaware, 1911); James E. Armstrong, History of the Old Baltimore Conference from the Planting of Methodism in 1773 to the Division of the Conference in 1857 (Baltimore: the Author, 1907); John Bowen, The Rise and Progress of Methodism on Sam's and Pipe Creek, Maryland, from the Year 1764 (Baltimore, n.p., 1856); Elmer T. Clark, Methodism in Western North Carolina (N. p.: Western North Carolina Conference, the Methodist Church, 1966); C. Franklin Grill, Methodism in the Upper Cape Fear Valley (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1966); William L. Grissom, History of Methodism in North Carolina, from 1772 to the Present Time (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1905). Minutes of the Annually Conferences, 1783, 1813, I, pp. 18, 229.

49. Consult, Albert Deems Betts, History of South Carolina Methodism (Columbia, S. C.: Advocate Press, 1952); Abel E. Chreitzberg, Early Methodism in the Carolinas (Nashville, Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1897); Albert M. Shipp, The History of Methodism in South Carolina (Nashville: Southern Methodism Publishing House, 1883). Minutes of the Annually Conferences, 1786, 1800, I, pp. 26, 92.



noticed a "great dearth of religion," but after his 1791 tour of the state, the Methodist leader wrote, "O How great the change . . . We have now some precious souls converted to God."<sup>50</sup> Methodist societies were also formed in Georgia as early as 1786 and by 1800 over 1,600 persons had joined the Church.<sup>51</sup>

Methodism also expanded in northern regions of the United States during the late 1780's. The denomination spread along the Hudson River and entered western New York in 1788. Freeborn Garrettson was a prominent minister associated with Church advance in this region. Itinerants founded churches in northeastern Pennsylvania during the 1780's. The conference minutes reported 11,686 members in the New York Conference in 1805.<sup>52</sup> New England with its strong Calvinistic

50. Asbury, Journal, 1 (February 28, 1785 and February 8, 1791), pp. 484, 667.

51. For Methodist Church work in Georgia consult, Alfred M. Pierce, A History of Methodism in Georgia, February 5, 1736-June 24, 1955 (N.p.: North Georgia Conference Historical Society, 1956); Edmund Jordan Hammond, The Methodist Episcopal Church in Georgia (N.p.: n.p., 1935); George Gilman Smith, The History of Georgia Methodism from 1785 to 1866 (Atlanta, Ga.: A. B. Caldwell, 1913); The History of Methodism in Georgia and Florida from 1785 to 1865 (Macon, Ga.: Jno. W. Burke & Co., 1877). Minutes of the Annually Conferences, 1800, I, p. 92.

52. For the entrance and growth of Methodism in these sections of the United States see, Louis De Forest Palmer, Heroism and Romance: Early Methodism in Northeastern Pennsylvania (Stroudsburg, Pa.: the Author, 1950); Charles F. Eggleston, editor, Pioneering in Penn's Woods: Philadelphia Methodist Episcopal Annual Conference Through One Hundred Fifty Years (N.p.: Philadelphia Conference Tract Society, 1937); Jacob S. Payton, Our Fathers Have Told Us: The Story of the Founding of Methodism in Western Pennsylvania (Cincinnati: Ruter Press, 1938); John Atkinson, Memorials of Methodism in New Jersey (Philadelphia: Perkinpine & Higgins, 1860); Samuel A. Seaman, Annals of New York Methodism; Being a History

background was initially antagonistic to Arminian Methodism, but in 1789 the conference sent Jesse Lee to the region. He encountered severe opposition to his message in every town. "A great many wish us to depart," Lee exclaimed in July, 1791. But the walls of prejudice were eventually weakened and by 1804 more than 7,500 Methodists were reported in New England. <sup>53</sup>

American migration to regions west of the Appalachian Mountains increased during the early national period. A number of these pioneers were members of the Church and the Methodist leaders sent preachers to trans-Appalachia as early as 1783. In 1788 Bishop Asbury crossed the mountains and held the first annual conference for western itinerants at Keywoods' in Washington County, Virginia. <sup>54</sup> By 1800, a

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of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the City of New York from A.D. 1766 to A.D. 1890 (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1892); Samuel Gregg, The History of Methodism Within the Bounds of the Erie Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. I (N.p.: the Author, 1865); George Peck, Early Methodism Within the Bounds of the Old Genesee Conference from 1788 to 1828 (New York: Published by Carlton & Porter, 1860). Minutes of the Annually Conferences, 1805, I, p. 131.

53. For a short treatment consult, Douglas R. Chandler, "Enthusiasm vs. Education? Early Methodist Preachers in New England," Duke Divinity School Review, 34 (Autumn, 1969), pp. 188-95. The most important work dealing with the Church in this period is George C. Baker, An Introduction to the History of Early New England Methodism, 1789-1839 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1941). Other works are Otis Cole and Oliver S. Baketel, editors, History of the New Hampshire Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (N.p.: the Conference, 1929); James Mudge, History of the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1796-1910 (Boston: Published by the Conference, 1910). Minutes of the Annually Conferences, 1804, I, p. 119.

54. R. N. Price, "The First Methodist Conference West of the Alleghanies," Methodist Quarterly Review, (October, 1888), pp. 3-24.

a separate Western conference was organized and during the following decade Methodism spread along the entire frontier.<sup>55</sup> William McKendree (1757-1835), later a Bishop, was the most important western leader by the turn of the century, but many circuit-riders contributed to Church advance. The west became one of the greatest sources of expansion in the early 1800's.<sup>56</sup>

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55. The literature on western Methodism is voluminous. A few of the more important works are William Warren Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, Vol. IV, The Methodists, 1783-1840 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946); Rise of Methodism in the West; Being the Journal of the Western Conference, 1800-1811 (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1920); Walter Brownlow Posey, The Development of Methodism in the Old Southwest, 1783-1824 (Tuscaloosa: Weatherford Printing Company, 1933); Cullen T. Carter, Methodism in the Wilderness 1786-1836 (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1959); Wallace G. Smeltzer, Methodism on the Headwaters of the Ohio: The History of the Pittsburgh Conference of the Methodist Church (Nashville: the Author, 1951); Anson West, A History of Methodism in Alabama (N.p.: the Author, 1893); Robert Henry Harper, Louisiana Methodism (Washington, D.C.: Kaufman Press, 1949); John B. McFerrin, History of Methodism in Tennessee, Vol. I (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1869); Albert H. Redford, The History of Methodism in Kentucky, Vol. I (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1868); Richard N. Price, Holston Methodism; From Its Origins to the Present Time, Vol. I (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1903); Frank C. Tucker, The Methodist Church in Missouri, 1798-1939 (N.p.: Joint Committee of the Historical Societies of the Missouri East and Missouri West Annual Conferences, 1966); John M. Barker, History of Ohio Methodism (Cincinnati: Curts & Jennings, 1898); Elizabeth C. Nottingham, Methodism and the Frontier; Indiana Proving Ground (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941); James Leaton, History of Methodism in Illinois, from 1793-1832 (Rushville, Ill.: the Author, 1883).

56. William McKendree is the subject of Robert Paine, Life and Times of William M'Kendree, 2 Vols. (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1869); E. E. Hoss, William McKendree; A Biographical Study (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1916); Albea Godbold, "Bishop William McKendree and His Contribution to Methodism," Methodist History, 8 (April, 1970), pp. 3-12; Rembert G. Smith, "William McKendree," Methodist Review, 45 (May, 1929), pp. 409-25.

A Church division interrupted Methodist development in the 1790's. James O'Kelly (1775-1826), a successful preacher and elder, led the disruption and organized a new religious body.<sup>57</sup> The dissatisfied minister objected to the centralized leadership of the Methodist Church under Francis Asbury and also complained of Methodist acquiescence concerning slavery. "James O'Kelly . . . makes heavy complaints of my power," the Bishop wrote in 1790.<sup>58</sup> O'Kelly believed that a "consolidated government" hindered the progress of religion and built his faction on democratic principles. In the new sect, every preacher stood on "equal footing. There were . . . no grades in ministry."<sup>59</sup> The schism reached its height in Virginia and North Carolina between 1792 and 1796, but also affected societies elsewhere.

The impact of this disruption declined in importance during the late 1790's. Unrest and strife characterized O'Kelly's church and the leader was not able to control his ministers or members. A number of persons returned to the

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57. The new sect was originally called the Republican Methodist Church. But this name was later changed to the Christian Church. For information on the life of James O'Kelly consult, Wilbur E. McClenny, The Life of Rev. James O'Kelly and the Early History of the Christian Church in the South (Raleigh, N.C.: n.p., 1910); Frederick A. Norwood, "James O'Kelly--Methodist Maverick," Methodist History, 4 (April, 1966), pp. 14-28.

58. Asbury, Journal, 1 (January 12, 1790), p. 620.

59. This account of O'Kelly's thinking appears in Bennett, Methodism in Virginia, pp. 324-25, 327. This work is somewhat biased in tone. The author was an important leader in the Methodist Church, South.

Methodist Episcopal Church before 1800.<sup>60</sup> Attacks on the character of Bishop Asbury contributed to O'Kelly's rejection by a majority of Methodists. Henry Smith (17?-1840), a western Methodist, discovered that Asbury had been "shamefully misrepresented." William McKendree became acquainted with the Methodist leader on a journey and returned to the regular Church.<sup>61</sup>

The Methodist Church was influential in shaping the course of American cultural development during the early nineteenth century. This was due in part to an explosion in membership which the Church experienced after the War of 1812. The annual conferences recorded 214,235 members in 1816 and 695 traveling preachers; but by 1844 over one million persons had joined the denomination and more than four thousand ministers rode American circuits.<sup>62</sup> The Methodist Episcopal Church was the largest religious body in the United States from the 1820's through the 1840's. In 1820 there were eleven annual conferences, but by 1844 that number had expanded to thirty-eight.<sup>63</sup> Local church

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60. Frederick A. Norwood, "The Church Takes Shape," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 440-52.

61. Bennett, Methodism in Virginia, p. 323; Paine, William McKendree, pp. 128-39. Also see McClenny, James O'Kelly, passim.

62. Minutes of the Annually Conferences, 1816, I, p. 282, Vol. III, 1840-1845 (New York: Published by P. P. Sandford & C. P. Tippet, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1846), III, p. 603.

63. Minutes of the Annually Conferences, 1820, 1844, I, p. 346; III, p. 603.

expressions of the national body could be found in nearly every American community.

When the Church expanded Methodists faced many new situations. The denomination confronted at least three major tests during the period from 1800 to 1844. As Methodist leaders planned for and resolved these dilemmas, their religious movement moulded cultural development in the United States. The basic form for Methodist growth was already well established by the War of 1812. The denomination simply duplicated its success in seaboard and the immediate trans-Appalachian regions in other sections of the United States.

The education of the new Methodist generation became one acute need in this period. The Church was moderately successful in its attempt to resolve this deficiency. Methodist leaders diffused the teaching, preaching and religious experience of older members among newer converts through published literature. Tracts, sermons, religious magazines, biographies and autobiographies in addition to other printed sources contained important instruction for Church members. Circuit-riders distributed printed materials to members of the denomination. They also sold books and pamphlets to many American citizens. Many Methodists were

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64. For the beginnings and activities of early Methodist publishing consult, James Penn Pilkington, The Methodist Publishing House: A History, Vol. I (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968); Leland D. Case, "Origins of Methodist Publishing in America," Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America, 59 (First Quarter, 1965), pp. 12-27; H. C. Jennings The Methodist Book Concern: A Romance of History (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1924). Accounts of the duties

also concerned with the education of children in the Christian faith. The Church joined the widespread Sunday School movement in an effort to provide for this need. Secondary and higher institutions of learning were also established during the early nineteenth century.<sup>65</sup>

Methodists also confronted the problem of Church unity. A number of small schisms occurred in the early national period, but these disruptions did not significantly check denominational conduct or advance.<sup>66</sup> However, the events which led to the

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of Methodist book agents appear in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, passim; Methodism in the West, pp. 73ff, passim. For brief but informative comments see, Richard M. Cameron, "The New Church Takes Root," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 278-87; William R. Cannon, "Education, Publication, Benevolent Work and Missions," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 571-82.

65. The subject of early Methodist attempts at providing education for children and ministers is treated in Addie Grace Wardle, History of the Sunday School Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1918); Sylvannus M. DuVall, The Methodist Episcopal Church and Education up to 1865 (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1928); Daniel L. Marsh, "Methodism and Early Methodist Theological Education," Methodist History, 1 (October, 1962), pp. 3-13; Kenneth E. Rowe, "New Light on Early Methodist Theological Education," Methodist History, 10 (October, 1971), pp. 58-62. For the founding of specific schools see, William C. Caywood, Jr., "Kentucky Wesleyan College and Its Struggle for Survival," Filson Club Historical Quarterly, 26 (July, 1952), pp. 236-50; John Hardin Thomas, "The Academies of Indiana," Indiana Magazine of History, 11 (March, 1915), pp. 8-39; Oscar A. Weit, "The Movement to Establish Lebanon Seminary, 1833-1835," in Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, 59 (Winter, 1966), pp. 384-406; Richard Irby, History of Randolph-Macon College (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, n.d.). See also, Cameron, "New Church," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 265-78; Cannon, "Education," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 547-71, 582-86.

66. Some of the early divisions in American Methodism resulted in the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1816), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (1820), the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church (1813),

formation of the Methodist Protestant Church in 1828 first threatened and eventually disrupted Methodist ranks. A short summary of this movement presents the factors inherent in the division. The nature of Church government became a core issue for a number of Methodist ministers during this period. Early American Methodism was a centralized and autocratic organization which emphasized the submission of local congregations and circuit-riders to the authority of the Bishop. In one historian's words, early American Methodists were "self-consciously" champions of nationalism; nevertheless, the Church was "deficient in democracy."<sup>67</sup> A more democratic "radical" element arose in Methodist ranks and called for "reform." These members and ministers concentrated their debates on the nature of the office of presiding elder, the power of Bishops and the lack of lay participation in Church government.

A presiding elder was the average preacher's immediate superior in the ministry. He governed a district and directed the affairs of itinerants on its several circuits. Bishops stationed presiding elders in districts without consulting regular circuit-riders. The Methodist Church expected the

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the William Hammett Primitive Methodist Church (1792), the Reformed Methodist Church (1814), the Stillwellites (1820), the Primitive Methodists (1811), The James O'Kelly schism has already been mentioned. For a discussion of these divisions consult, Frederick E. Maser and George A. Singleton, "Further Branches of Methodism are Founded," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 601-35. The authors' notes are helpful in guiding the reader to secondary and primary sources.

67. Douglas R. Chandler, "The Formation of the Methodist Protestant Church," in Bucke, American Methodism, p. 6.



unquestioned compliance of the average minister with the bishop's decision. In the early 1820's, the "reformers" questioned this autocratic process. The "radical" element led by Nicholas Snethen (1769-1845) and Asa Shinn (1781-1853) desired a more democratic church. The more numerous conservative element led by Bishop William McKendree rejected the assumptions and proposal of this minority. The difference in opinion became a hotly contested battle of governmental principles. These two groups within American Methodism clashed at the General Conferences of 1820 and 1824; and the issue of Church democratization came to a head in 1828. A number of Methodist ministers were expelled from the Church for their actions. The expulsions triggered the withdrawal of additional preachers. These reformers met in Baltimore and formed the Methodist Protestant Church in 1828. The new Methodist Protestant Church constitution reflected democratic sentiments and the religious body spread in many communities. This division was the most serious schism in the history of the Church from 1766 to 1843.

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68. An autobiography of one of the leaders in this reform movement is George Brown, Recollections of Itinerant Life, Including Early Reminiscences (Cincinnati: R. W. Carroll and Co., Publishers, 1866). A secondary account of other leaders is T. H. Colhouer, Sketches of the Founders of the Methodist Protestant Church (Pittsburgh, Methodist Protestant Book Concern, 1880). Also see, Ancel H. Bassett, A Concise History of the Methodist Protestant Church (Pittsburgh, Press of Charles A. Scott, 1877). See the first constitution of the Church, Constitution and Discipline of the Methodist Protestant Church (Pittsburgh, N.p., 1830). Important comments on the disruption by a recent Church historian are Chandler, "Methodist Protestant Church," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 636-83.

The Church faced certain elements in American society that opposed traditional Methodist belief and action. The religious movement confronted two dangers when it challenged basic faults in American culture. Through too rigid a stance on specific issues, Methodism would offend a large portion of the Church and perhaps discourage citizens of the United States from joining the denomination. The Methodist stand on particular "evils" reflect this dilemma.

The antebellum era in the history of the United States was characterized by Negro slavery. English Methodists, under John Wesley, opposed the institution. Early American Methodist leaders also condemned Negro bondage as a sin and in 1784 issued a statement which directly challenged slavery. Bishops Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke in addition to other preachers lamented the development of this institution and attempted to outlaw slaveholding in the Methodist Episcopal Church. But, many members and ministers of the denomination approved of slavery and defended its practice by the scriptures. This element reacted violently to the anti-slavery stand in the Church. Over the course of a number of years, Methodist leaders acquiesced, abandoned the advanced declaration of 1784 and tolerated slaveholding by members of the denomination. The Church compromised its original position and conformed to the values of Southern society.

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69. The history of Methodism and slavery in this period is treated in Donald G. Matthews, Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965); Joseph Crane Hartzell, Methodism and

A number of factors influenced this compromise on principles. The desire for the preservation of Church unity and effectiveness in American life partially explained Asbury's failure to enforce anti-slavery sentiment. The values and principles of Methodist leaders were not automatically transferred to members. In this instance, when it seemed unlikely that change would occur in the attitude of the laity, Methodists abandoned their efforts to reform the Church.<sup>70</sup> The most important explanation for the com-

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the Negro in the United States (New York; Hunt & Eaton, 1894); Lucius C. Matlack, The History of American Slavery and Methodism, from 1780 to 1849 (New York; N.p., 1849). Also see, W. Harrison Daniel, "The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Negro in the Early National Period," Methodist History, 11 (January, 1973), pp. 40-53; Walter Brownlow Posey, "Influence of Slavery upon the Methodist Church in the Early South and Southwest," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 17 (March, 1931), pp. 530-42. For race relations in the Church consult, Charles B. Swaney, Episcopal Methodism and Slavery (Boston; Richard G. Badger, 1926); Whitney R. Cross, The Negro in the Methodist Church (New York; Board of Missions and Church Extension, Methodist Church, 1951); James B. F. Shaw, The Negro in the History of Methodism (Nashville; Parthenon Press, 1954); William B. Gravely, "Methodist Preachers, Slavery and Caste: Types of Social Concern in Antebellum America," Duke Divinity School Review, 34 (Autumn, 1969), pp. 209-29. The undercurrent of anti-slavery thrust in the Church is treated in Lewis M. Purifoy, "The Methodist Anti-Slavery Tradition, 1780-1844," Methodist History, 4 (July, 1966), pp. 3-18; H. E. Martin, "Anti-Slavery Activities of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Tennessee," Tennessee Historical Magazine, 2 (1916), pp. 98-109; Lucius C. Matlack, The Anti-Slavery Struggle and Triumph in the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York; Phillips & Hunt, 1881). Comments on missions and instruction for slaves is found in Donald G. Matthews, "The Methodist Mission to the Slaves, 1829-1844," Journal of American History, 51 (March, 1965), pp. 615-31; Grant S. Shockley, "Methodism, Society and Black Evangelism in America: Retrospect and Prospect," Methodist History, 12 (July, 1974), pp. 145-82; Milton C. Sernett, Black Religion and American Evangelicalism: White Protestants, Plantation Missions, and the Flowering of Negro Christianity, 1787-1865 (Metuchen, N. J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1975).

70. See Daniel, "The Negro," pp. 45-53.

promise concerned the religious motivation of members. Slavery was simply not outlawed in the scripture. The average Methodist was intensely concerned with his salvation. Because many Methodists believed that it was possible to hold negroes in subservience and enter heaven, they rejected the notion of manumission. Thus, the largest religious group in the United States sanctioned slavery until the General Conference of 1844.<sup>71</sup>

But the Methodist Church successfully challenged and corrected a number of wrongs in American culture. When the denomination was organized in 1784 the United States was in the midst of a tremendous religious decline. Citizens in the newer frontier regions were often not church members. The same situation characterized eastern communities where religion was often a matter of form and ritual. In the early 1800's, the Methodists became one of the chief exponents of the Great Revival which swept eastern and western America.<sup>72</sup>

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71. In 1845 the Church divided into a northern and southern branch and remained in that condition until 1939. See Bucke, American Methodism, Vol. II.

72. A primary account is Extracts of Letters Containing Some Account of the Work of God Since the Year 1800. Written by the Preachers and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, to Their Bishops (New York; Published by E. Cooper and J. Wilson, for the Methodist Connection in the United States, 1805). Two important monographs are John B. Boles, The Great Revival, 1787-1805; The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind (Lexington; The University Press of Kentucky, 1972); Catherine C. Cleveland, The Great Revival in the West, 1797-1805 (Chicago; The University of Chicago Press, 1916). Also see, Clement Eaton, "The Ebb of the Great Revival," North Carolina Historical Review, 23 (January, 1946), pp. 1-12; Durwood T. Stokes, "North Carolina and the Great Revival of 1800," North Carolina Historical Review, 43 (Autumn, 1966), pp. 401-12.

The Church brought its moral influence to the frontier and assured the advance of a Christian oriented civilization for the United States.<sup>73</sup> Through the use of such means as the camp-meeting, Methodism became the most important denomination in the west.<sup>74</sup> The Methodists also influenced the more established eastern regions and brought new religious experience to its citizens.<sup>75</sup> In this revival process the Church emphasized the necessity of repentance and attacked sins such as drunkenness and adultery. The religious awakening was actually a movement of faith and conviction where individuals were confronted with their sin and turned to God for salvation. Through this message, the Methodist movement left its imprint on a generation of American citizens and influenced the development of culture in the United States.<sup>76</sup>

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73. William Warren Sweet, "The Churches as Moral Courts of the Frontier," Church History, 2 (March, 1933), pp. 3-21.

74. For the camp-meeting in the west consult, Charles A. Johnson, The Frontier Camp Meeting; Religion's Harvest Time (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955); Dickson D. Bruce, And They All Sang Hallelujah; Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1974).

75. Boles has stated, "Historians, in their concern with the west, have tended to ignore the . . . antecedents of the movement. Instead of being unique to the . . . frontier, the theology and techniques of the Kentucky revival were developed, and the personnel trained, in the east." Great Revival, p. x. For eastern meetings see, Guion Griffis Johnson, "The Camp Meeting in Ante-Bellum North Carolina," North Carolina Historical Review, 10 (April, 1933), pp. 105-15; Charles A. Johnson, "A Baltimore Circuit Camp Meeting, October, 1806," Maryland Historical Magazine, 44 (December, 1949), pp. 269-74.

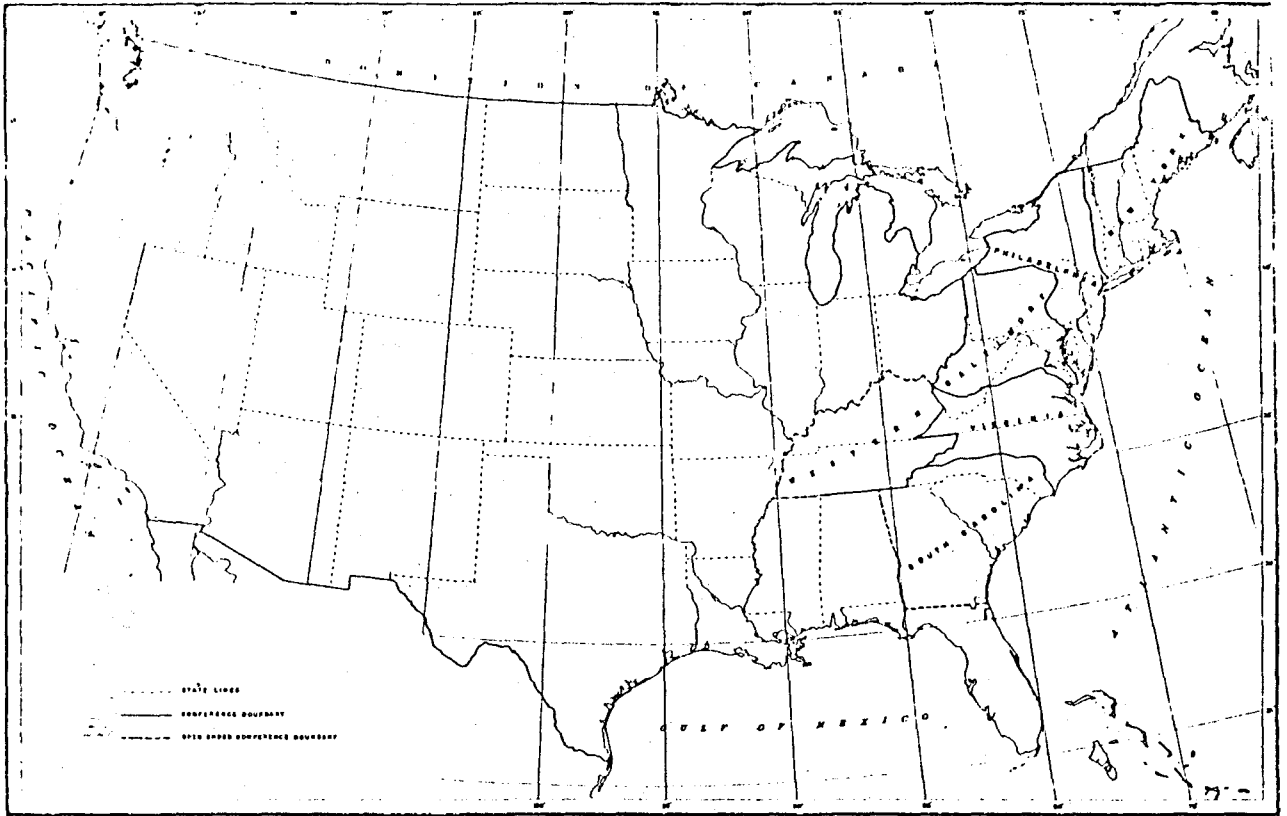
76. Baptists, Presbyterians and other Protestant groups preached a similar message of repentance. Methodists were one part of this revivalistic tradition which left its imprint on American society. Cameron, "New Church," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 256-61.

Older ministers, who lived through this remarkable period of Church expansion, judged the viability of Methodist religion in mid-nineteenth century. Their comments should not be dismissed as mere emotional reminiscing. The writings of elderly preachers shed light on Methodist change in the early nineteenth century. They compared Church activity in the early 1800's with the denomination's apparent success in 1840. Some ministers lamented the decline in religious vitality among members that had accompanied the increase in numbers. As the Church grew prosperous many members lost zeal. Pride and worldliness characterized the conduct of a number of Methodists in the 1840's. The older itinerants attributed Church expansion to the hand of God; but in prosperity, they claimed, the religious standards of Methodism were lowered. They called for a return to the example of Methodism practiced by early American members.

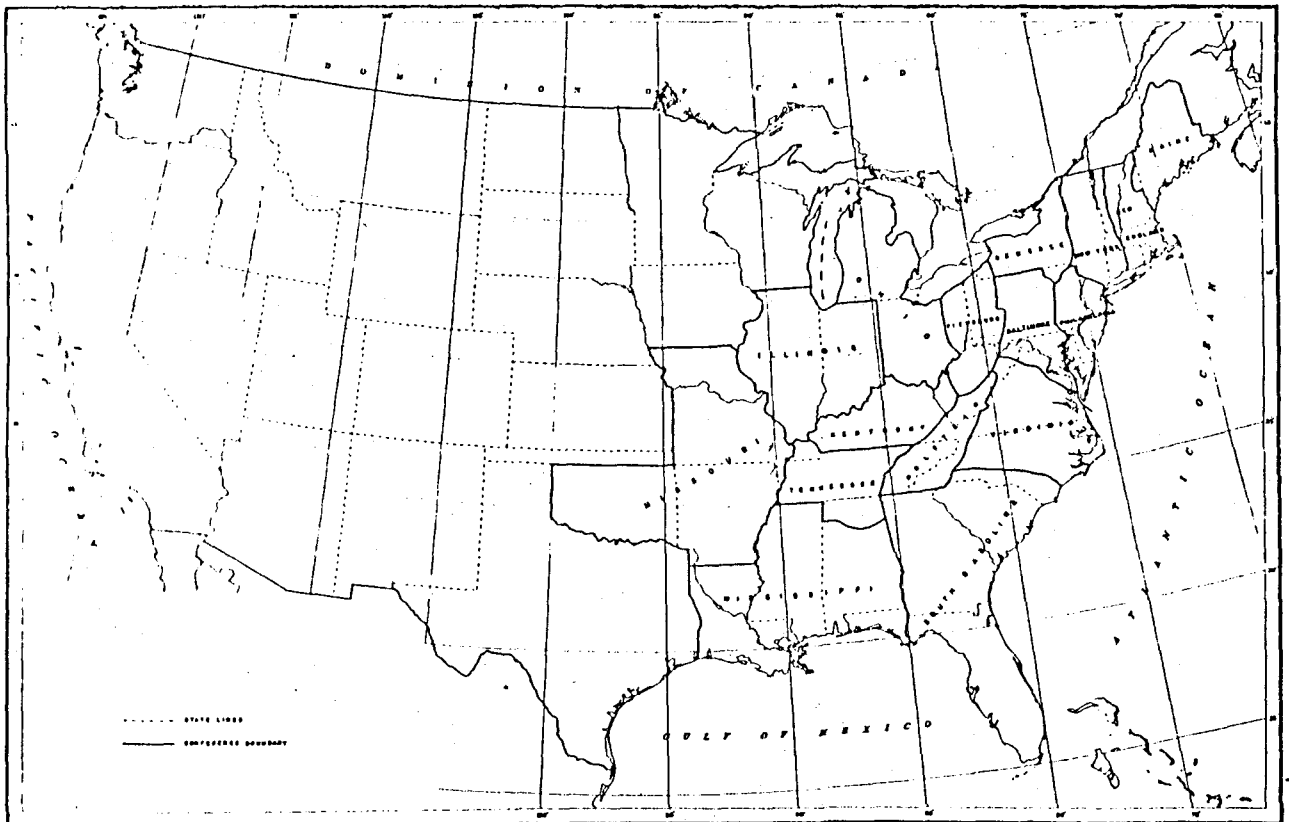
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77. For two commentators consult, Cartwright, Autobiography, pp. 334-37; James B. Finley, Sketches of Western Methodism, Biographical, Historical, and Miscellaneous, Illustrative of Pioneer Life (Cincinnati, Printed at the Methodist Book Concern for the Author, 1854), passim.

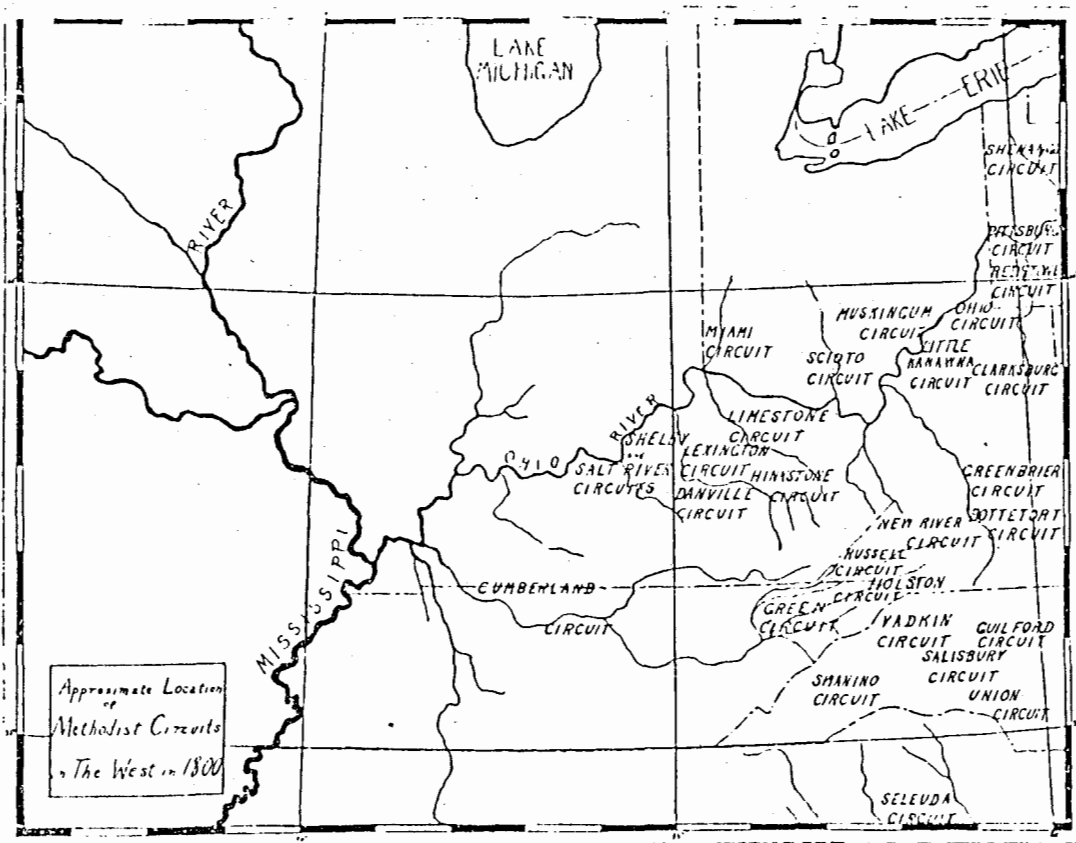
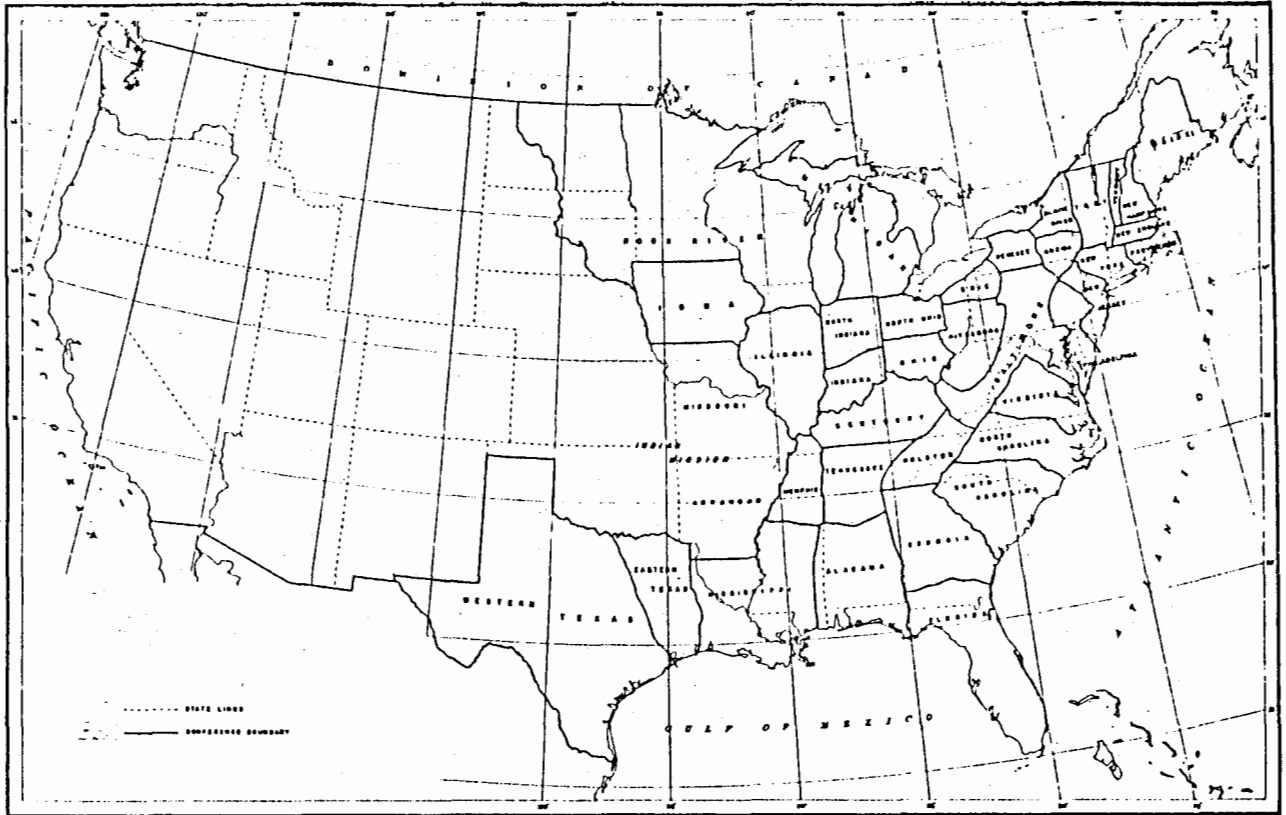
1796 ANNUAL CONFERENCES - METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH



1828 ANNUAL CONFERENCES - METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH



# 1844 ANNUAL CONFERENCES - METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH





## CHAPTER TWO

### CHURCH STRUCTURE AND THE TRAVELING PREACHER

The circuit-rider was the central expression of Methodism in the United States. Once each month, and occasionally more often, the traveling minister appeared in a community. Methodist ministers on horseback were familiar figures in both eastern and frontier regions; and the itinerant's infrequent visits and constant travel were noted characteristics of the Methodist ministry in the minds of the American people. During the early nineteenth century, American citizens often described the severity of a storm by stating: "There's no one out today, but crows and Methodist preachers."<sup>1</sup> Historians of Christianity in the United States have often focused their attention on the activities of the Methodist circuit-rider. They have debated his contributions to the development of culture. Scholars also contrast the ministry of the Baptist farmer-preacher, who resided among his congregation, and the Methodist itinerant, who traveled.<sup>2</sup> The circuit system and its component part, the traveling minister, distinguished the early American Methodist Episcopal Church.

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1. For a brief but informative discussion of the importance of the circuit system in the United States see, William Warren Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, Vol. IV, The Methodists, 1783-1840 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946 ). Also consult, Arthur Bruce Moss, "Methodism in Colonial America," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 117-18.

2. For an example of this discussion see, William Warren Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1783-1840 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952).

A single Methodist itinerant supplied a plurality of congregations. This fact was the genius of the Methodist circuit system. The Church capitalized on the religious enthusiasm of each itinerant. Methodism spread across the United States during the early national period as a result of the ministry of the traveling preacher.

The Methodist Church was a well organized unit in the United States. Bishops directed preachers by the hundreds across the continent. Itinerants and Methodist administrators met in general conferences, annual conferences and quarterly conferences. The general conference, instituted in 1792, convened every fourth year to examine and elect bishops. As the "legislature and high court" of the Church this body discussed important ecclesiastical and doctrinal issues.<sup>3</sup> The annual conference was directly related to the activities of circuit preachers. Methodist ministers from regions as large as Virginia attended conference sessions. This body examined ministers, received new candidates for ministry

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3. William Beauchamp, Letters on the Call and Qualifications of Ministers of the Gospel and on the Apostolic Character and Superior Advantages of the Itinerant Ministry (Charleston: Published by John Early, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1849), pp. 25-27; Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, pp. iv, 44; Frederick A. Norwood, "The Church Takes Shape," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 419-87; James M. Buckley, Constitutional and Parliamentary History of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1912), passim; John J. Tigert, A Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1904), passim; William Henry Milburn, Ten Years of Preacher-Life: Chapters from an Autobiography (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1859), p. 69.

and collected and appropriated money for Methodist concerns. Each annual conference was divided into a number of districts and each district was in turn subdivided into circuits. A presiding elder governed the district and directed traveling preachers on the many circuits. The leaders of each circuit conducted quarterly conferences to direct local affairs.<sup>5</sup>

A number of men became traveling ministers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In this era, the denomination did not establish social or educational qualifications for ordination. Church leaders accepted every sincere man as a candidate for ministry. Itinerants from sixteen to over sixty years age traveled horseback on American circuits. Peter Cartwright (1785-1872), the famous pioneer Methodist, entered the ministry at eighteen and journeyed for over fifty years as a circuit-rider.<sup>6</sup> Most preachers were "plain-folk" -- members of the toiling classes. These average citizens became ministers and rose to prominent positions in the denomination as they demonstrated ability.

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4. Walter Brownlow Posey, The Development of Methodism in the Old Southwest, 1783-1824 (Tuscaloosa: Weatherford Printing Company, 1933), Chapter IX; Milburn, Ten Years, pp. 67-68; Norwood, "The Church Takes Shape," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 419-87; Buckley, Constitutional and Parliamentary History; Tigert, Constitutional History.

5. Posey, Methodism in the Old Southwest, Chapter IX; Milburn, Ten Years, pp. 66-67; Norwood, "The Church Takes Shape," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 419-87; Buckley, Constitutional and Parliamentary History; Tigert, Constitutional History.

6. Most Methodists were convinced of a ministerial obligation before the age of thirty. Peter Cartwright, Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, Centennial Edition (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 338.

The success of a minister depended on religious factors.<sup>7</sup>  
 Henry Bidleman Bascom (1796-1850), a poor backwoods farmer and hunter from Kentucky, joined the ministry in the early 1800's. But, Bascom eventually became a famous Bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.<sup>8</sup>

How was one ordained as a circuit rider? What screening process did the Church establish for candidates? What requirements did the denomination establish for preachers? Only converted Methodists were considered for the ministry. But, not every converted Methodist was a proper subject for the task of preaching. The Church did not consider women for ordination and carefully guarded against the ordination of unstable Methodist men who aspired to the ministry.

A foundational principle of early American Methodism insured that preachers were "called to the work of the ministry by the Holy Ghost."<sup>9</sup> It was a duty of each Methodist, who felt

7. The social background of the Methodist circuit-rider is treated in Dickson D. Bruce, And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1974), pp. 44, 124. See also, James Bradley Finley, Sketches of Western Methodism, Biographical, Historical, and Miscellaneous, Illustrative of Pioneer Life (Cincinnati: Printed at the Methodist Book Concern for the Author, 1854), pp. 155.

8. Bishop Bascom's life is subject of M. M. Henkle, The Life of Henry Bidleman Bascom, D.D., LL.D., Late Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (Louisville: Published by Morton and Griswold, 1854). The minister was elected Chaplain to Congress on a number of occasions and served as an agent for the American Colonization Society. Bascom was President of Transylvania University for many years. His successes demonstrate the mobile society of the early nineteenth century.

9. Beauchamp, Letters, pp. 51-52; William Henry Milburn, The Pioneers, Preachers and People of the Mississippi Valley (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1860), p. 362.

inspired to preach, to question his motives and abilities in light of God's will. "Is it right," William Henry Milburn (1823-1903) asked, "for any man to make choice of the ministry as a profession, in the same way, and from the same motives" that he would choose "law, medicine, or science?"<sup>10</sup> One Methodist followed this advice and rejected the thought of preaching for two years. He feared that the desire to enter the ministry originated in pride and became convinced that his "call" was a temptation. Many others desired to proclaim the gospel, but felt personally unqualified for the task. Jesse Lee (1758-1816) believed his talent and religious experience were inadequate for the ministry and also feared that he would injure the cause of Christ. But, Lee later became the apostle of Methodism in New England and was elected Chaplain to Congress in the early 1800's.<sup>11</sup>

At times, the Church recruited men for the ministry. Methodists encouraged members to pursue ordination in a variety of ways. More experienced circuit-riders often convinced young men to enter itinerant ranks. Local Methodist Church members recommended those with obvious ability for the traveling ministry. Finally, Methodists believed that the Lord, through various means, made his call irresistible.

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10. Milburn, Ten Years, p. 49.

11. Joseph Travis, The Autobiography of the Rev. Joseph Travis, A.M.: A Member of the Memphis Annual Conference, edited by Thomas Summers (Nashville: Published by E. Stevenson and F. A. Owen, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1856), p. 29; Minton Thrift, Memoir of the Rev. Jesse Lee; With Extracts from His Journal (New York: Bangs and Mason, 1823), pp. 40-43.

William Watters (1751-1833), the first native American itinerant, was not formally trained for the ministry: "yet," he wrote, "the word of the Lord would be as fire in my bones, and I dare not refrain from declaring his lovingkindness to my fellow sinners."<sup>12</sup>

A number of Methodists received dreams or signs which convinced them of a call to preach. Joseph Travis (1790-1859), an early frontier minister, felt led to enter the ministry, but was unsure of God's will. Travis received the following confirmation when he attended a meeting in which a Methodist preached:

I retired into the woods, and prayed to my heavenly Father that if it was his will that I should preach, he would give me a token. . . . The minister commenced a talk on the ministry, and finally turned around to the right, and with his finger pointed at me, saying, 'There stands a young man that the Lord intends to make a preacher, if he will but go home and get more religion.' Truly, had the earth opened under my feet, I could not have felt much more consternation than I did on that occasion.<sup>13</sup>

A Methodist member, through one or more of these various means, was assured of a call to the ministry.

The prospective preacher then obtained a license from an ordained minister to "exhort." The exhorter was not a full-fledged itinerant, but his license entitled him to certain privileges. In local gatherings he called sinners to repentance when the traveling preacher concluded his sermon.

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12. Asbury, Journal, 1 (February 6, 1773), p. 69; William Watters, A Short Account of the Christian Experience, and Ministerial Labours, of William Watters; Drawn up by Himself (Alexandria; Printed by S. Snowden, 1806), p. 23.

13. Travis, Autobiography, p. 30.

If a Methodist demonstrated talent in this practice, he was recommended to the quarterly conference for a license to preach.<sup>14</sup> His local church forwarded a letter of commendation on his behalf. The quarterly conference was attended by leaders from a single circuit who met four times annually and conducted Church business. This body questioned the candidate concerning his religious experience and doctrinal beliefs and "after proper Examination as to his gifts and Usefulness" granted the license. When he passed this examination the conference recommended him to the annual conference for "admission into the traveling connection."<sup>15</sup> The quarterly meeting often sent a newly licensed preacher to a circuit where he could gain experience through acquaintance with an older minister. But, the licensee was not ordained and traveled under the direction of a preacher "in Charge."

Methodist preachers in a single conference gathered once each year under the direction of a bishop. This religious group examined candidates for the full-time ministry. Each session it received a number of men in the following manner:

From the Holston District; William Ellington, born in the state of Georgia, has been in the profession of religion about two years, and has traveled eleven months, and came recommended from. . . Clinch Circuit.<sup>16</sup>

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14. Milburn, Ten Years, pp. 66-67; Finley, Western Methodism, p. 399.

15. "Church Records of Salt Creek Circuit, 1829-1833," Journal of Illinois State Historical Society, 4 (April, 1911), pp. 60-61.

16. William Warren Sweet, Rise of Methodism in the West; Being the Journal of the Western Conference, 1800-1811 (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1920), p. 92.

"I was received as a preacher on trial . . . on the day that I completed my twentieth year," one itinerant boasted.<sup>17</sup> The event marked the transition from a life of ease to one of constant travel and hardship. The Church stationed new itinerants on difficult circuits where they "remained on trial" for two years or more. Those who remained faithful in their religious duties were "received into full connection."<sup>18</sup>

Methodist leaders directed the circuit-rider's activities in the traveling ministry. Church government was organized for this task. The Methodist itinerant was transferred almost every year. Bishops stationed preachers on any circuit within a conference. At a typical annual conference over one "hundred men . . . surrendered their right of choice, and placed their lives and fortunes, under God, at the disposal of a single man--the bishop."<sup>19</sup> A circuit-rider occasionally requested a particular appointment, but Church leaders possessed the authority to deny appeals. The bishop, at the end of a conference, read the coming year's appointments and most "preachers took their stations without murmuring."<sup>20</sup> However, one pioneer minister

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17. Milburn, Ten Years, pp. 78-79.

18. Sweet, Methodism in the West, pp. 105, 110.

19. Beauchamp, Letters, p. 27; Milburn, Ten Years, pp. 79-80.

20. James B. Finley, Autobiography of Rev. James B. Finley; or, Pioneer Life in the West, edited by W. P. Strickland (Cincinnati; Printed at the Methodist Book Concern for the Author, 1855), pp. 253-54; Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 236.



assigned an unusually difficult circuit in the west, complained to Bishop Asbury. But, the Methodist leader placed his arms around the young man and replied, "O no, my son; go in the name of the Lord. It will make a man out of you."<sup>21</sup> The young preacher reluctantly obeyed and endured a difficult year, but later considered this an important experience. Peter Cartwright was stationed on six circuits during his first eight years in the ministry. They were:

- 1804.....Salt River and Shelby Circuit, Kentucky District.
- 1805.....Scioto Circuit, Ohio District.
- 1806.....Muskingum Circuit, Ohio District.
- 1807.....Barren Circuit, Cumberland District.
- 1808.....Salt River Circuit, Kentucky District
- 1809.....Livingston Circuit, Cumberland District.
- 1810.....Livingston Circuit, Cumberland District.
- 1811.....Christian Circuit, Wabash District.<sup>22</sup>

The Church examined the personal religious life of each itinerant. Denominational leaders, through this exercise, prevented incompetency in the ministry. A body of fellow ministers examined a preacher's character during the annual conference and most itinerants were approved. But, the assembly exposed the un-Christian conduct of some preachers. "There was great strictness observed in the examination of the preachers characters," Asbury once wrote, "some were reproved before the conference for . . . lightness and other follies."<sup>23</sup> This humiliation before a group of peers served

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21. Cartwright, Autobiography, p. 75.

22. Sweet, Methodism in the West, pp. 99, 109, 122, 136, 152, 171, 189, 206.

23. Ibid., pp. 106, 115, 143; Asbury, Journal, 2 (March 1, 1802), p. 329.

as warning for the future conduct of every circuit-rider present.

The Church brought itinerants to trial when they committed extremely serious offenses. An Illinois Conference preacher was charged with three counts of immoral conduct and came before a committee of the Shelbyville circuit in 1839. This religious court carefully weighed testimony from each side, but found the minister guilty and suspended him from the Church. The ex-preacher wrote the Illinois annual conference and pleaded guilty to immorality and high imprudence. "I believe that I ought to be expelled" from the Church he sadly concluded. "But I ask Your prayers that my poor soul may yet be saved for which I am intent to strive, hence forth while life shall last." <sup>24</sup> Violations of the Methodist Discipline, stealing, fraud and other sins were included as trial offenses. When a minister was guilty he was "expelled from the M. E. Church." But, if the ex-<sup>25</sup> itinerant repented he could rejoin the denomination. "How awful the thought, that God should own a man and make him a blessing to many souls, and then lay him aside like a broken instrument," Asbury wrote in regard to one preacher. "Yet so it was, because of his sin. May others take warning by his fall!" <sup>26</sup> Methodist ministers valued purity in this era.

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24. Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, pp. 648-59.

25. Ibid., Chapter XIII; Circuit-Rider Days Along the Ohio; Being the Journals of the Ohio Conference from Its Organization in 1812 to 1826 (New York; The Methodist Book Concern, 1923), p. 163.

26. Asbury, Journal, 1 (February 14, 1781), p. 400.

The social life of an itinerant was enriched through contact with fellow preachers. Ministers renewed acquaintances when they gathered to conduct Church business. The annual conference was an important event in this connection. It was characterized by Christian unity since the Methodist preachers who attended sessions shared many common experiences. Most preachers had not seen one another for over a year and prayed for a "deeper baptism of love."<sup>27</sup> At one conference Jesse Lee was deeply moved and "felt sorry at parting with the preachers."<sup>28</sup> During the year Methodist circuit-riders communicated through letters and informed others of God's work in their region. "I saw a letter from Bro. Kobler to Bishop Asbury," one itinerant stated, "which said that Bro. Maxey and You [Stith Mead] Had Broken up the very Bowels of Botetourt circuit, Glory to God, for the outpouring of his Spirit."<sup>29</sup> Every minister cherished correspondence.

The Church supported traveling preachers financially. But, because the denomination generally attracted the less affluent, itinerants were often poor. A minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in one preacher's words, "learned

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27. Bangs, Freeborn Garrettson, p. 239; Henry Boehm, Reminiscences, Historical and Biographical, of Sixty-four Years in the Ministry by Rev. Henry Boehm, edited by J. B. Wakefield (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1865), p. 120.

28. Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 236.

29. Nathaniel Harris to Stith Mead, May 3, 1793 in Stith Mead MS Letterbook, 1793-1795, p. 80. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

. . . to have few wants." <sup>30</sup> The circuit-rider's salary was sixty-four dollars per annum, but he often received less than half that sum. If the minister was married his wife also received an equal amount and the Church allotted the family a smaller grant for each child. In 1816 the Church increased the salary for both the itinerant and his wife to one hundred dollars and in 1836 it was raised to two hundred dollars per year. <sup>31</sup> Church members in many instances provided ministers with food, clothing, shelter and other basic necessities. Perhaps, the Methodist traveling preacher and the circuit system could not have survived without this aid.

Constant road travel was expensive and the itinerant's salary seldom covered a year's expenditures. At times the preacher replenished his funds through offerings. But, this practice was unpopular and presented certain problems. A Methodist in western New York recorded this experience:

Four weeks ago I gave out for a public collection . . . to be made to-day, but very few came to meeting. My friend . . . spoke of the collection, but nobody said anything in reply. . . . I came off without anything.

In four months he received only three dollars and fourteen

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30. Posey, Methodism in the Old Southwest, p. 124; W. W. Hibben, Rev. James Havens One of the Heroes of Indiana Methodism (Indianapolis: Sentinel Company, Printers and Binders, 1872), p. 43.

31. Walter Brownlow Posey, Frontier Mission: A History of Religion West of the Southern Appalachians to 1861 (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1966), p. 106; Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 65.

cents from the people.<sup>32</sup> But, ministers were often more successful and raised money.<sup>33</sup> Itinerants did not expect to receive great amounts of money in the ministry. Their ultimate goal extended beyond the material gains of this life. In regard to his financial aspirations, Henry Bidleman Bascom wrote,<sup>34</sup> "I did not engage in the ministry to accumulate wealth."

The Methodist ministry promoted faithful preachers to the office of deacon, elder, presiding elder or bishop. Deacons administered the ordinances of baptism, marriage and the burial of the dead only when elders were not present. The annual conference elected men as deacons and bishops ordained them by prayer and by the laying on of hands. Traveling preachers often administered ordinances and when a minister was admitted into full connection he was also elected as a deacon. A Church leader gave the itinerant a signed parchment which recorded the ordination.<sup>35</sup> Elders administered the sacraments and ordinances and the annual conference

32. George Peck, Early Methodism Within the Bounds of the Old Genesee Conference from 1788-1828; Or, The First Forty Years of Wesleyan Evangelism in Northern Pennsylvania, Central and Western New York and Canada (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1860), p. 52.

33. Henry Smith, Recollections and Reflections of an Old Itinerant (New York: Lane & Tippet, 1848), p. 344; Alfred Brunson, "A Methodist Circuit Rider's Horseback Tour from Pennsylvania to Wisconsin, 1835," in Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 15 (1900), pp. 264-91.

34. Henkle, Henry Bidleman Bascom, pp. 80-81.

35. Cartwright, Autobiography, pp. 74-75; Sweet, Methodism in the West, pp. 178-79; Boehm, Reminiscences, p. 122.

elected preachers to this office. They were ordained by a bishop. Ministers became eligible for the office when they completed two years in full-time ministry.<sup>36</sup>

Presiding elders and bishops were administrative agents of the Church. Traveling preachers who were promoted to these positions directed the affairs of the itinerant ministry. The Church only considered qualified and experienced men for these important posts. The duties of a presiding elder included his direction of from ten to twenty circuit-riders in a district. William Burke (1770-1855), an early western Methodist, became famous after he was promoted to this office and the well-known Peter Cartwright was a presiding elder for over fifty years.<sup>37</sup> Bishops possessed great authority and governed the affairs of the entire Church. These dedicated men traveled throughout the United States continually preaching and attending the annual conferences. Only fourteen persons held the office from 1784 to 1844.<sup>38</sup> Francis Asbury, a Methodist Bishop for over thirty years, was one of the best known clergymen of his day.

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36. Sweet, Methodism in the West, pp. 129-30.

37. William Burke, "Autobiography of William Burke," in Finley, Western Methodism, pp. 22-92; Peter Cartwright, Fifty Years as a Presiding Elder, edited by W. S. Hooper (Cincinnati; Hitchcock & Walden, 1871).

38. The Bishops were; Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury (1784); Richard Whatcoat (1800); William McKendree (1808); Robert R. Roberts and Enoch George (1816); Joshua Soule and Elijah Hedding (1824); James O. Andrew and John Emory (1832); Beverly Waugh and Thomas A. Morris (1836); Leonidas Hamline and Edmund S. Janes (1844). Minutes of the Annually Conferences, I, pp. 124, 305; II, p. 121; III, p. 479.

The Church sanctioned retirement for "worn-out" circuit-riders. A "located" (or retired) minister did not travel and no longer received financial support from the denomination. A number of preachers were hampered by physical breakdowns and ceased traveling. One man lost his voice after he preached for over twenty years and "was obliged to abandon his vocation."<sup>39</sup> Some Methodists died on circuit and the careers of others were shortened because of illness. Many elderly circuit-riders simply collapsed<sup>40</sup> under the daily strain of itinerant life and retired. Younger ministers who married were subject to financial difficulty and the husband often retired to care for the material needs of his family. "Many, very many, pious and useful preachers, were literally starved into a location,"<sup>41</sup> one Methodist declared. The annual conference sanctioned locations for ministers with legitimate physical or financial problems.<sup>42</sup> Younger itinerants often remained settled

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39. William Henry Milburn, The Pioneer Preacher; Or, Rifle, Axe, and Saddle-Bags, and Other Lectures (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1857), p. 60; Preachers and People, p. 364; Smith, Recollections, pp. 43-44.

40. Finley, Western Methodism, pp. 151, 296; Sweet, Circuit-Rider Days, pp. 101, 264; D. R. M'Anally, Life and Times of Rev. William Patton, and Annals of the Missouri Conference (St. Louis: Printed at the Methodist Book Depository, 1858), p. 42; Thomas M. Hudson, Life and Times of Rev. Thomas M. Hudson, of the Pittsburgh Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1871), p. 170.

41. Cartwright, Autobiography, p. 74.

42. Sweet, Methodism in the West, pp. 140, 143, 146.

for a season and recovered health and financial stability; but, then they eagerly rejoined the traveling ministers. Thomas M. Hudson (1799-1881), a preacher in the Pittsburgh annual conference, located with a serious illness, but once the itinerant's health was restored he became a full-time minister.<sup>43</sup> Although they encountered hardship many Methodists endured the effects of the traveling ministry and preached the message of salvation to American citizens.

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43. Hudson, Life and Times, p. 179.



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE EDUCATION AND PERSONAL LIFE OF METHODIST ITINERANTS

Personal application characterized the education of the Methodist itinerant. His informal ministerial training and his private devotional life were closely related. The circuit-rider's conversion and daily observance of Christian<sup>1</sup> duties became the foundation for his ministry.

The Church emphasized experimental religion as the essential ministerial qualification. Methodist ministers preached to citizens with the authority of personal experience. They discovered that Americans responded to this style of preaching. The Church judged a circuit-rider according to the practical results of his ministry. Godly men were designated through the conversion of those to whom they preached. A college education might qualify men to "defend the outposts of religion," one commentator explained, but did not "qualify them for teaching sinners the way to heaven . . . . In regard to the Christian ministry" formal training held a secondary place to experimental and practical religion."<sup>2</sup>

But, the earliest American Methodist Discipline stressed the importance of extensive private study in place of formal religious instruction. Itinerants were encouraged in 1784

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1. Posey, Frontier Mission, p. 109; Finley, Autobiography, p. 200.

2. Finley, Western Methodism, pp. 97-99; Cartwright, Autobiography, pp. 236-37, 265; Thrift, Jesse Lee, pp. 41-42.

to "read the most useful Books, and that regularly and constantly."<sup>3</sup> This rule reflected the influence of John Wesley on the development of the American Church. The English religious leader studied the Bible, Greek, Hebrew, Christian books, tracts and additional secular works throughout his life. The Methodist movement was born in the scholarly atmosphere of Oxford.<sup>4</sup> American Methodists respected their founder's example and urged itinerants to study five out of every twenty-four hours. Reading was the most important activity in this regard.<sup>5</sup>

The Methodist Church attempted to establish an informal program of religious study to assist traveling preachers. However, by 1816, it was apparent that more effective guidelines and powers of enforcement were needed for educating the circuit-rider. The General Conference in that year admitted that there was a "manifest defect among" the traveling ministers concerning "ministerial qualifications." The Conference recommended a specific two year reading program for preachers on trial. But, in 1824 the Church noted that "in some instances . . . young preachers have not been

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3. Minutes of Several Conversations Between the Rev. Thomas Coke, LL.D., The Rev. Francis Asbury and Others, at a Conference Begun in Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, on Monday, the 27th of December, in the Year 1784. Composing a Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers and Other Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. (Boston: Methodist Historical Society, 1887), p. 17.

4. Tyerman, John Wesley, Vol. I.

5. Minutes of Several Conversations, p. 8.

furnished with the course of study contemplated by the book of Discipline." It was not until the 1830's that the Church printed materials for theological training on a regular basis. <sup>6</sup>

Itinerants also devised substitutes for college instruction. The denomination's more experienced ministers became valuable teachers through their personal acquaintance with younger itinerants. Many circuit-riders diligently studied the scriptures and other available literature. A preacher's spiritual development was largely determined by his personal ambition. With the absence of formal preparation, itinerants learned through personal study and their participation in the ministry. <sup>7</sup>

Circuit-riders received helpful instruction from more experienced Methodist ministers. A traveling preacher was initially stationed on circuit under the direction of an older itinerant. <sup>8</sup> Peter Cartwright was, in his own opinion, "greatly . . . favored" because he traveled with godly Methodists during his first two years in the ministry. Itinerants often rode great distances in order to reach religious meetings, but younger ministers developed a relationship with the elder

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6. Journals of the General Conference, 1796-1836 (New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1855), 1816, 1824, pp. 149-51, 298. Kenneth E. Rowe, "New Light on Early Methodist Theological Education," Methodist History, 10 (October, 1971), pp. 58-62.

7. Posey, Frontier Mission, p. 16.

8. George Brown, Recollections of Itinerant Life; Including Early Reminiscences (Cincinnati: R. W. Carroll and Co., Publishers, 1866), p. 77. For additional examples of this practice see, Watters, Ministerial Labours, p. 24; Travis, Autobiography, p. 42; Henkle, Henry Bidleman Bascom, pp. 23-29.

preacher during these travels. They coveted the counsel, advice and experience of successful Methodists who had endured hardships to preach Christ.<sup>9</sup> A very "intimate association of the elder and younger men, . . . constitute a prominent feature of the mental discipline of . . . Methodist preachers," William Henry Milburn stated. "The habit of constantly seeking and imparting instruction, and the urgent need for . . . information"<sup>10</sup> became one source of education for the circuit-rider.

Methodist ministers led disciplined lives. A preacher's religious life demanded constant attention and the accumulation of knowledge through a variety of activities insured spiritual growth. Personal Bible study was a minister's most important duty in this regard and preachers were often termed "men of one book."<sup>11</sup> Every Methodist believed that the scriptures were divinely inspired and with Methodists no book was "equal to the Bible." "I find none like it," Francis Asbury exclaimed. It was of "more consequence to a preacher to know his Bible well, than all the languages or books in the world--for he is not to preach these, but the word of God."<sup>12</sup> On another occasion, Asbury wrote, "We are sure that the Sacred Scriptures are of God; and we are as sure, if any man speak

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9. Cartwright, Autobiography, p. 67; Dailey, Thomas Smith, p. 37; W. P. Strickland, The Life of Jacob Gruber (New York, Published by Carlton & Porter, 1860), p. 36; Milburn, Ten Years, pp. 95-97.

10. Milburn, Ten Years, p. 65.

11. Milburn, Saddle-Bags, p. 69.

12. Asbury, Journal, 1 (February 5, 1778, July 23, 1779, and August 23, 1776), pp. 263, 306, 198.

contrary to them, he is not of God." Another preacher reverently wrote, "O My Bible, Every days experiance leads me to love thee more & more!!!"<sup>13</sup>

The Church provided members and itinerants with religious literature. Through personal study ministers learned the Methodist Discipline and Hymnal.<sup>14</sup> The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, published in numerous editions, contained the major articles of Methodist religion. Circuit preachers studied this work and became acquainted with Church theology. They also committed much of the Methodist Hymnal to memory and studied many doctrinal tracts, scriptural commentaries and religious biographies.<sup>15</sup> The publications of John Wesley were of course widely demanded. The Church published Wesley's Notes upon the New Testament and Journal in many editions. The minister also consulted books by John William Fletcher, Richard Baxter, William Law, John Smith, Charles Rollin, Josephus, Thomas Newton, John Locke and others concerning topics relating to religion, philosophy and history.<sup>16</sup>

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13. Benjamin Lakin, "The Journal of Benjamin Lakin, 1794-1820," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 414.

14. The Discipline was published in many editions after 1784. For one example of a Methodist hymnal see, Stith Mead, A General Selection of the Newest and Most Admired Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Now in Use (Richmond; Seaton Grantland, 1807).

15. Milburn, Preachers and People, p. 366.

16. Asbury once stated, "The reading of Mr. Wesley's journal has been made a blessing to me, and I hope for victory over all my foes." Journal, 1 (September 29, 1772), p. 45. See Leland Scott, "The Message of Early American Methodism," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 328-37; Rowe, "New Light," pp. 59-61.

Circuit-riders studied articles in Methodist periodicals dealing with theology. The Arminian Magazine; Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on General Redemption appeared in 1789 and 1790. The initial volume of the Methodist Magazine, the first continuing literary journal of American Methodism, was published in 1818.<sup>17</sup> A Methodist itinerant, depending largely on his level of interest, consulted a wide assortment of tracts and books; but this literature supplemented study of the scriptures.<sup>18</sup> The preacher became acquainted with the essential Christian doctrines including: the depravity of man, the redemption in Christ, repentance, faith, the direct witness of the Spirit, sanctification, future rewards and punishment, baptism, the perseverance of saints, the resurrection of the dead and Methodist Church government.<sup>19</sup>

The circuit-rider subjected his life to daily discipline. Personal study commenced early each morning and continued during the day. John Wesley Childs (1800-1850), a minister in the Virginia conference, always "rose a little before four--prayed & read his Bible for an hour." On one occasion Childs "prayed & read the scriptures till near six."<sup>20</sup> A

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17. Scott, "Message," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 328-37.

18. For works that Bishop Asbury consulted see, Ezra Squier Tipple, Francis Asbury; Prophet of the Long Road (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1916), pp. 89-110. Also see Thrift, Jesse Lee, pp. 60, 81, 180.

19. Rowe, "New Light," p. 61.

20. John W. Childs, "Memorandum Book of J. W. Childs

western Methodist itinerant stated that as "soon as the light" became strong, he arose and studied his "little Bible . . . on the knees" for up to three hours. When a scripture passage applied to one of his particular needs "tears coursed their way down . . . the sacred page."

Ministers spent available time reading and reflecting as they traveled to Methodist gatherings. Milburn stated that

sometimes day were passed in a solitude as deep . . . as that of the African deserts. Under such conditions a man must be on . . . good terms with himself. . . . For such times, however, I usually had an unfailing resource in my Bible and hymnbook; Checking my horse until I had spelled out a verse, I started again and trotted along until this was firmly fixed in the memory.<sup>23</sup>

Ministers prayerfully considered Christian testimonies and religious teachings in many books. Some circuit-riders recorded daily events, read and edited a journal. One of the Methodist traveling preachers noted the content of every sermon he heard and later studied its important lessons.<sup>24</sup> The itinerant often adopted a daily schedule. This routine varied according to the individual, but many of the preachers established a pattern to guide them in their study. Wilbur Fisk (1792-1839), a presiding elder in the Vermont District

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Latter Part of the Year 1833 & 1834," p. 1, in John Wesley Childs Papers, Randolph-Macon Library, Ashland, Virginia. John Ellis Edwards, Life of Rev. John Wesley Childs; For Twenty-Three Years an Itinerant Methodist Minister (Richmond, Va., and Louisville, Ky., Published by John Early, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1852), p. 93.

21. Milburn, Saddle-Bags, p. 58.

22. Ibid.

23. Milburn, Ten Years, pp. 94-95.

24. Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 19.

kept the following rules for Christian development:

1. To retire at nine and rise at five.
2. To appropriate one hour to my morning devotions.
6. Will spend one hour in miscellaneous reading.
7. One hour for my devotions at noon.
11. Whenever constrained to break in upon my regular course, I will endeavor to prevent loss of time by returning to it as soon as may be, and then attend to those branches which my judgement dictates it will be most important . . . ; at all times remembering not to curtail my devotions, or my preparations for the Sabbath.
12. When, in the course of my employments, a passage of Scripture occurs to my mind, or a striking thought occurs to me, I will take the first opportunity to committ it to writing.
13. In my devotions it shall be my particular duty to pray for a deepening of the work of grace in my heart and for a revival . . . where I labor.<sup>25</sup>

Circuit-riders also learned important lessons through contact with the American public. They became acquainted with human problems and needs in face to face relationships. Ministers encountered many personalities while they traveled and this increased their ability to discern sources of human conduct. The circuit-riders were thus enabled to relate the gospel to specific individuals in a convincing manner. Peter Cartwright was a successful preacher, in the opinion of one minister, because he was able to "read human nature as men read a book."<sup>26</sup>

Christian perfection was an important ultimate goal for many Methodist preachers. The writings of John Wesley, the

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25. George Prentice, Wilbur Fisk (New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1890), pp. 42-43. Fisk was perhaps one of the most educationally inclined Methodist ministers of his day and his concern for this aspect of Christian training is reflected in his rigid schedule.

26. Milburn, Ten Years, p. 41. See also his Preachers and People, pp. 365-66.



founder of English Methodism, were influential in America and he taught that Christians could become sanctified in this life. Wesley believed once a man was converted he became a Christian, but true believers also sought the "second blessing"--holiness of heart. In sanctification, according to the British religious leader, the old carnal nature was eradicated and the power of sin was destroyed. When believers repented and yielded their wills to God, the Holy Spirit instantly possessed their hearts and crucified the corrupt nature. In theory the Christian was enabled to live a perfect religious life.<sup>27</sup> Wesley once stated that in this process "inward sin is . . . totally destroyed; the root of pride, self-will, anger, love of the world, is then taken out of the heart. . . . The carnal mind, and the heart bent to backsliding are entirely extirpated."<sup>28</sup> This form of teaching was acknowledged as scripturally sound by American Methodist itinerants during this era. "Respecting Christian perfection," Freeborn Garrettson wrote, "I believe such a thing to be attainable in this life."<sup>29</sup> Henry Smith

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27, John Wesley, Plain Account of Christian Perfection, revised edition (Naperville; Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1952); see also William Edwin Sangster, The Path of Perfection, an Examination and Restatement of John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection (New York; Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1943); Orville S. Walters, "The Concept of Attainment in John Wesley's Christian Perfection," Methodist History, 10 (April, 1972), pp. 12-29; "John Wesley's Footnotes to Christian Perfection," Methodist History, 12 (October, 1973), pp. 19-36.

28. Quoted in J. Sidlow Baxter, A New Call to Holiness; A Restudy and Restatement of New Testament Teaching Concerning Christian Sanctification (Grand Rapids; Zondervon Publishing House, 1973), p. 46.

29. Bangs, Freeborn Garrettson, p. 67.

stated, "I more than ever see the doctrine is Scriptural, and firmly believe the blessing to be attainable."<sup>30</sup> Francis Asbury often longed to be "wholly devoted to the Lord" and sought to be "more spiritual."<sup>31</sup>

Methodist circuit-riders earnestly sought to experience "full" sanctification. Daily religious discipline was one means to that end. Preachers often fasted to humble themselves before God. Each day itinerants were also employed in the Christian's important duty of "self-examination."<sup>32</sup> They often prayed for hours in order to be cleansed from every sin. The Methodist's most important task was to "fix the eye of faith on . . . Jesus"--the example of holiness.<sup>33</sup> But, because the standard was perfection itinerants often failed and were frustrated with religious efforts. One day a preacher might have "power over all outward and inward sin," but on the next day he might be "troubled by manifold temptations."<sup>34</sup> For several months William Watters experienced the evils of his unsanctified nature and became disillusioned.

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30. Smith, Recollections, p. 325.

31. Asbury, Journal, 1 (January 16, 1773, October 6, 1771), pp. 67, 6. See also George Peck, The Scriptural Doctrine of Christian Perfection Stated and Defended (New York: Published by G. Lane and C. B. Tippet, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1845). For a recent study consult, John Leland Peters, Christian Perfection and American Methodism (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956).

32. Richard Whatcoat, "The Journal of Bishop Richard Whatcoat, August 1, 1789--December 31, 1790," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 118; Lakin, "Journal," in Ibid., p. 223; Asbury, Journal, 1 (June 14, 1774), p. 119.

33. Lakin, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 208; Asbury, Journal, 1 (June 14, 1774), p. 119.

34. Ibid., pp. 118-119.

Many ministers were ashamed of their small progress and attainment in Christian faith and righteousness.<sup>35</sup> Prayer was the only weapon of defense for ministers in a time of severe temptation, and when unholy thoughts entered their minds, preachers waited for God's help.<sup>36</sup>

Henry Smith became aware of the "utter depravity" of his nature and lost confidence in his salvation. One western preacher did not attain perfection and had a constant fear of hell. This circuit-rider felt that it was impossible for him to be restored to God's favor and was filled with melancholy and despair. Even Francis Asbury, the American Methodist leader, had "fears of coming short of eternal life."<sup>37</sup> Many preachers experienced doubts concerning their salvation. A circuit-rider might remain in this uncertain frame of mind for months, but recovered confidence when he trusted the "merits and mercies" of Christ.<sup>38</sup> After passing through one such trial of faith a Methodist wrote, "thro mercy the cloud broke, & for these 6 months past [I] have been very happy."<sup>39</sup>

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35. Watters, Ministerial Labours, p. 31; Dailey, Thomas Smith, p. 103; Lakin, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 208.

36. Bangs, Freeborn Garrettson, p. 63.

37. Smith, Recollections, pp. 46-47; Finley, Western Methodism, p. 53; Asbury, Journal, 1 (August 11, 1772; September 13, 1784), pp. 38, 468.

38. Thomas Ware, Sketches of the Life and Travels of Rev. Thomas Ware (New York; Published by T. Mason and G. Lane, 1839), p. 264; Bangs, Freeborn Garrettson, p. 67.

39. Jno. Hagerty to Edward Dromgoole, March 3, 1787, in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 134.

Itinerants experienced religious fulfillment when they completed the requirements for holiness. Preachers often achieved a degree of victory over sin and in return received divine blessing. Garrettson had many "sweet hours" in fellowship with God while he attained "purity of heart."<sup>40</sup> Jesse Lee experienced instances when the love of God dominated his life to the exclusion of everything else. He often recorded these occasions of Christian fulfillment:

I feel my heart detached from the world, and a constant breathing after holiness . . . I would, at times, find myself lost in meditation, and fancy that I could hear abundance of people shouting glory! glory to God! . . . and being pleased with the . . . sound, I would start to attend to it more particularly, . . . my soul was on the wing, and I mounted higher and higher by faith and love, towards heaven.<sup>41</sup>

Methodist circuit-riders were subject to constant personal changes, but the transformation of character brought the ministers many rewards.

A number of Methodist preachers claimed to have experienced supernatural manifestations of God's power. They were occasionally guided through dreams and premonitions. One minister was shown the plight of sinners in hell in a "night vision" and "took warning."<sup>42</sup> Benjamin Abbott (1732-1796), a Virginia conference preacher, recorded the fulfillment of

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40. S. R. Beggs, Pages from the Early History of the West and North-West (Cincinnati, Printed at the Methodist Book Concern, 1868), pp. 52-53; Bangs, Freeborn Garrettson, p. 91.

41. Thrift, Jesse Lee, pp. 81, 271.

42. Bangs, Freeborn Garrettson, pp. 124-25; For other dreams consult, Dalley, Thomas Smith, pp. 142-43; Travis, Autobiography, p. 54; Asbury, Journal, 1 (May 13, 1790), p. 635.

one of his dreams;

On a Saturday night, I dreamed that a man came to meeting, and staid in class, and spake as I never had heard any one before. Next day, James Sterling came to meeting, stayed in class and spake much as I had heard and seen in my dream.

This convert later became a pillar in the local church and Abbott attributed his dream to God.<sup>43</sup> A frontier camp-meeting was threatened one afternoon with a violent storm, but the minister in charge arose and stated that the audience should remain seated. He predicted that it would not rain for two days. When the final meeting concluded it poured in torrents and Methodists accredited this prophecy to the Lord.<sup>44</sup>

One day Benjamin Lakin (1767-1849) was strongly "impressed" that he would preach a funeral sermon in the very near future. As Lakin traveled on circuit he passed a house and was notified that the owner had recently died. The minister declared his profession and was invited to preach at the burial. "Who can account for those impressions," he concluded, "may it not be by the ministry of angels."<sup>45</sup> Many Methodist Church members condemned those who believed in such spiritual events. Their relationship with God was based on a more practical faith. "Individuals thought me

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43. John Firth, The Experience and Gospel Labours of the Rev. Benjamin Abbott (Harrisonburg; Printed by A. Davisson, 1820), p. 57.

44. Ware, Memoir, p. 229.

45. Lakin, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 224.

an enthusiast," Freeborn Garrettson exclaimed, "because I talked so much about feeling . . . impressions to go to particular places. I know the word of God is our . . . guide, [but]<sup>46</sup>. . . I also know, that both sleeping and waking, things of a divine nature have been revealed to me."

A Methodist minister's home life suffered severely while he traveled. It was financially difficult for ministers to support a family as they remained in the ministry. Many married men were forced to locate, but a number attempted to remain in the traveling connection.<sup>47</sup> The married circuit-rider's family was neglected in order that he might preach the gospel. He suffered in the ministry,<sup>48</sup> but it was a "heap harder" for the family. The preacher's wife considered her situation and made arrangements to "live accordingly." She kept house, educated the children and prayed for her husband as he journeyed. The family moved frequently and learned to possess a "good degree of [the]<sup>49</sup> missionary spirit." A husband and his wife agreed to sacrifice a settled marriage for Christ.

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46. Peck, Early Methodism, p. 51; Bangs, Freeborn Garrettson, p. 87.

47. Finley, Western Methodism, pp. 180-81.

48. Milburn, Ten Years, p. 83.

49. Smith, Recollections, pp. 127-35.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE TRAVELING MINISTER AND CIRCUIT LIFE

A stranger from the Ohio prairies once asked Bishop Francis Asbury the location of his home. The Methodist leader thought for a moment and replied, "Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, or almost any place you please." The confused citizen walked away shaking his head. But, Asbury's answer reflected a characteristic of the Methodist circuit system. Itinerants were literally pilgrims in the United States as they traveled from community to community to "spread Scriptural holiness."<sup>1</sup>

The ministry of a traveling preacher covered a large geographic region called a circuit. This area was distinguished by a name which was drawn from a local town, river or other physical feature. A number of circuit titles were recorded by the western conference in 1806 and exemplify the variety of factors which were involved in the naming process: New-River Circuit, Salt River Circuit, Muskingum Circuit, Appalouzas Circuit, Nashville Circuit and Powell's Valley Circuit.<sup>2</sup> The circuit was also known by the length of time it took the itinerant to complete a single round. Circuits varied from two weeks to six weeks and were from 120 to over 600 miles in length, but most circuits were four weeks and

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1. Ezra Squier Tipple, Francis Asbury; The Prophet of the Long Road (New York; Methodist Book Concern, 1916), p. 158.

2. Sweet, Rise of Methodism in the West, pp. 121-22.

and from 300 to 500 miles long.<sup>3</sup> Each of these regions included many communities where a minister had "appointments" or previous commitments to preach. The traveling preacher, on the scheduled day, appeared in the area and held a religious service. Young itinerants were encouraged to "never miss an appointment." Russel Bigelow (1792-1837), a western Methodist, was well-known because he had not missed a scheduled meeting in over eighteen years.<sup>4</sup> The itinerant conducted from ten to over thirty meetings on each circuit. When a Methodist minister was appointed to a region, the Church handed him a list of "preaching places." For example, the Fox River Circuit in the old northwest had twenty-eight meetings, including:

1. Commencing at Millbrook, on the Fox River; a small class.
2. At brother Well's, six miles south of Yorkville.
7. At Salt Creek; no class.
18. Crystal Lake.
24. At the mouth of the Kishwalku.
28. Iamnanauk.<sup>5</sup>

The Deer Creek Circuit in Ohio had twenty-nine appointments, including; Pickaway, Chillicothe, Hotsonpilers, Chinoweths, Browns and others.<sup>6</sup> James B. Finley was once stationed on a

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3. Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 143; Brown, Recollections, p. 80; A. H. Redford, Western Cavaliers; Embracing the History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Kentucky from 1832 to 1844 (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1876), pp. 416-17; Finley, Autobiography, p. 268; Milburn, Ten Years, p. 81; Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 89.

4. Milburn, Ten Years, p. 82; Finley, Western Methodism, p. 414.

5. Beggs, West and North-West, pp. 143-45.

6. Lakin, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 230.



circuit with twenty-five preaching places. But, in one year, he increased that number to thirty-eight.<sup>7</sup>

The minister traveled varying distances between these meetings. An idea of the extent of the journeys is found in Asbury's journal for May, 1780; "Near forty miles," "about thirty miles," "eighteen miles," "sixteen miles," "thirty-five miles," "20 miles," "ten miles," and "fifteen miles." The Methodist leader traveled from five to over nine hours on a number of days.<sup>8</sup> During a single year, Freeborn Garrettson journeyed over 5,000 miles and preached to five hundred gatherings. Henry Bidleman Bascom traveled 3,000 miles and attended four hundred meetings from November, 1814 to August, 1815. It has been estimated that Francis Asbury, "the Prophet of the Long Road," journeyed over 300,000 miles in a period of forty-five years. He visited Virginia alone more than one hundred times.<sup>9</sup>

Methodist membership varied from circuit to circuit according to the religious state of a region. The growth in most circuits was steady, but occasionally expanded rapidly through the influence of a revival. When a circuit became too large for a single minister the Church created a new circuit. Occasionally, a religious decline in the circuit

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7. Finley, Autobiography, p. 237.

8. Asbury, Journal, 1 (May 5 to 21 and July 11, 22, 1780), pp. 348-52, 365, 368.

9. Bangs, Freeborn Garrettson, p. 141; Henkle, Henry Bidleman Bascom, pp. 80-81; Tipple, Francis Asbury, p. 162.

resulted in a loss in membership. The Portsmouth Circuit, in southeastern Virginia, is an example of this fluctuation. In 1784, 191 Methodists were reported, but in 1786, this number rose to 356. A revival swept the Portsmouth area in the late 1780's and by 1790, there were over 1,600 Methodist members. The circuit declined in the 1790's as a result of a division in the Church; but, Portsmouth Methodism continued its growth in the early 1800's. In 1813, nearly 1,900 Methodists resided in the region.<sup>10</sup> The Nantucket Circuit, near Boston, is another example of characteristic Methodist development. The Church reported 312 persons in 1829, but by 1834, that number increased by 56--a steady growth.<sup>11</sup>

These statistics, which appeared in the Methodist minutes, partially revealed the spiritual condition of a circuit. But, when the Methodist itinerant toured his area, the religious state of its inhabitants became apparent. Some American cities and regions were well-known for ungodly characteristics. Francis Asbury once visited "Hell-Corner," named for its "desperate wickedness." When he visited Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1783, Asbury wrote, "All things prosper but religion."<sup>12</sup> After Thomas Coke traveled through Fredericksburg, Virginia, he called it a very "ungodly town."<sup>13</sup> Many persons

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10. Minutes of the Annually Conferences, 1784, 1786, 1790, 1813, pp.

11. *Ibid.*, 1829, 1834, II, pp. 28, 260.

12. Asbury, Journal, I (June 3 and August 11, 1783), pp. 426, 445.

13. Coke, Journals, pp. 27-28.

were "grossly addicted to habits of intoxication" on a western circuit where James B. Finley traveled. The same minister preached on a number of occasions in Newark, Ohio--  
 "a place . . . notorious for its wickedness."<sup>14</sup>

Itinerants were challenged by excessive iniquity in any section of the United States. They prayed that the inhabitants of the wicked region would experience revival. In some instances, this hope became a reality. Benjamin Abbott once led over one hundred citizens into the Church during a single year. Yet, when he came "to this circuit, there were but few that knew the Lord." Henry Boehm experienced "one of the most glorious" occasions of his ministry when an entire year "was one scene of revival." He left the circuit elated.<sup>15</sup> Finley conducted an awakening on the frontier and over 300 persons joined the Methodist Church in less than three months.<sup>16</sup> Every minister was happy when conversions were numerous.<sup>16</sup> But, in many instances, Methodist preachers had to remain content with a "gradual increase in the societies." Others became "burdened under . . . spiritual death" in a community where iniquity reigned, but prayed for a revival. Some preachers did not witness a religious awakening and, when they left a circuit, stated, "May the labors of my successor be blessed more than mine."<sup>17</sup>

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14. Finley, Autobiography, pp. 246, 229.

15. Firth, Benjamin Abbott, p. 154; Boehm, Reminiscences, p. 156.

16. Finley, Autobiography, p. 245; McAnally, William Patton, p. 46.

17. Burke. "Autobiography," in Finley, Western Methodism,

The Methodist Church expanded after its organization in 1784. Circuits, the scene of itinerant activity, were constantly in the process of growth and circuit riders often experienced satisfaction when they preached and added members to the Church, or founded new congregations. "Pioneer work," one minister termed this practice. "I was the first Methodist preacher who ever trod this soil," another itinerant boasted. When a citizen from one community attended a Methodist meeting in another region, he often invited the preacher to speak in his home town. If the itinerant received this offer, a new circuit was formed and the minister knew his "labors were acceptable to God."

The Methodist influence in a community became evident when members built a church. A house of worship represented the acceptance of the denomination by a portion of the local population. Only when membership increased could Methodists erect a meeting-house. In some cases, however, it was not necessary for the local church to construct a building. They simply possessed the structure of a less successful denomination. Many Anglican parishes were vacated during the

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p. 52; Asbury, Journal, 1 (June 28, 1789 and May 6, 1774), pp. 602, 114; Peck, Early Methodism, p. 53.

18. Boehm, Reminiscences, p. 112; Brunson, "Horseback Tour," p. 285.

19. Joseph Beaumont Wakeley, The Bold Frontier Preacher; A Portraiture of Rev. William Cravens, of Virginia (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1869), p. 18; Hudson, Life and Travels, pp. 45-48; Watters, Ministerial Labours, p. 36; Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 48.

American Revolution and in southeastern Virginia the Methodists fell heir to a number of the deserted buildings. Members of the denomination inhabited all of the following parishes: Union Chapel in Suffolk, Cypress Chapel in Nansemond County, Southern Branch Chapel near Portsmouth and Deep Creek Chapel in Norfolk County.<sup>20</sup> Methodists in other sections of the United States also inherited buildings, though for somewhat different reasons. One meeting-house on the American frontier changed hands from the Baptists to the Methodists when a re-<sup>21</sup>vival swept the area.

In most instances, Methodists built churches. The pattern for construction varied according to the needs of the local congregation. Methodists raised money for churches through subscriptions.<sup>22</sup> The first meeting-house was often no larger than a cabin.<sup>23</sup> One such building in southeastern Virginia<sup>24</sup> was only thirty by twenty-four feet in size. But, as the congregation grew, a larger structure became a necessity and<sup>25</sup> members built a more expansive church.

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20. George Carrington Mason, Colonial Churches of Tidewater Virginia (Richmond: Tidewater Publishers, Inc., 1945), pp. 183-84, 187, 168, 170.

21. Cartwright, Autobiography, pp. 87-89.

22. Beggs, West and North-West, p. 128. This practice is also seen in Boehm, Reminiscences, p. 94; Asbury, Journal, 1 (June 14, 1775 and August 23, 1782), pp. 158, 433.

23. Milburn, Ten Years, p. 57.

24. Mason, Churches, pp. 186-87.

25. Beggs, West and North-West, p. 126; Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 314; Asbury, Journal, 2 (February 6 and 13, 1805), pp. 458-59.

Denominational competition was a characteristic of American Christianity during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Itinerants were often active participants in religious controversy. Methodists rejected products of the Enlightenment, including Deism; and they also attacked false doctrines within the Christian Churches, including, Calvinism. Certain proselytizing elements were present in disputes between Methodists and members of other groups.<sup>26</sup> When Francis Asbury came to America in 1771 he presented his reasons for supporting the Methodist movement. "The doctrine they preach . . ., are, I believe, the purest of any people now in the world. The Lord has greatly blessed. . . this discipline. . . . They must . . . be pleasing to him."<sup>27</sup> Because God sanctioned Methodism, preachers felt justified in discarding the teachings of lesser Churches.

The battle-ground between the denominations was the circuit. Methodist ministers became alarmed when Baptist preachers capitalized on a Methodist revival and drew new converts "into the water." Many preachers encountered problems in their dealings with this popular Church.<sup>28</sup> Presbyterian,

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26. Leland Scott, "The Message of Early American Methodism," in Bucke, American Methodism, pp. 337-57; Walter Brownlow Posey, Religious Strife on the Southern Frontier (N.p.: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), passim.

27. Asbury, Journal, 1 (September 12, 1771), p. 4.

28. Burke, "Autobiography," in Finley, Western Methodism, p. 54; Finley, Western Methodism, pp. 147-48; Asbury, Journal, 1 (November 12, 1772), p. 52; Ware, Memoir, pp. 188-89; Cartwright, Autobiography, pp. 96-97; Bangs, Freeborn Garrettson, p. 102; Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 226.

Congregational and other denominational ministers were frequently subject to Methodist attack. Jesse Lee entered a New England circuit where Calvinism was the predominant faith. After weeks of failure, Lee preached against the doctrine,

I told them at last that God had taken his oath against Calvinism, because he had declared by the mouth of his holy prophet, 'As I live saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his evil way and live' on uttering these words, I felt . . . the power of God, . . . it appeared . . . as if the truth of the doctrine was sealed to the hearts of the hearers.

A small revival commenced and a Methodist church was established amidst this controversy.<sup>29</sup> Methodist ministers also drew members from other denominations on occasion. The religious faiths of this era were equally guilty of seeking converts from among the neighboring churches.

A number of circuit-riders freely disputed with members of other denominations. Peter Cartwright entered many doctrinal arguments.<sup>30</sup> But, other Methodist ministers avoided strife and ignored denominational differences. Henry Smith was not "fond of controversy" and stated: "O what a pity it is that the spirits of ministers should be soured against each other!"<sup>31</sup> Bishop Asbury echoed his words, saying that

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29. Finley, Autobiography, pp. 269-70; Bangs, Freeborn Garrettson, p. 219; Brown, Recollections, pp. 83-84, 88; Billy Hibbard, Memoir of the Life and Travels of Rev. B. Hibbard, (New York: Printed for and Published by the Author, 1825), pp. 137-38; Watters, Ministerial Labours, pp. 29-30; Smith, Recollections, p. 387; Thrift, Jesse Lee, pp. 100-04.

30. Cartwright, Autobiography, passim.

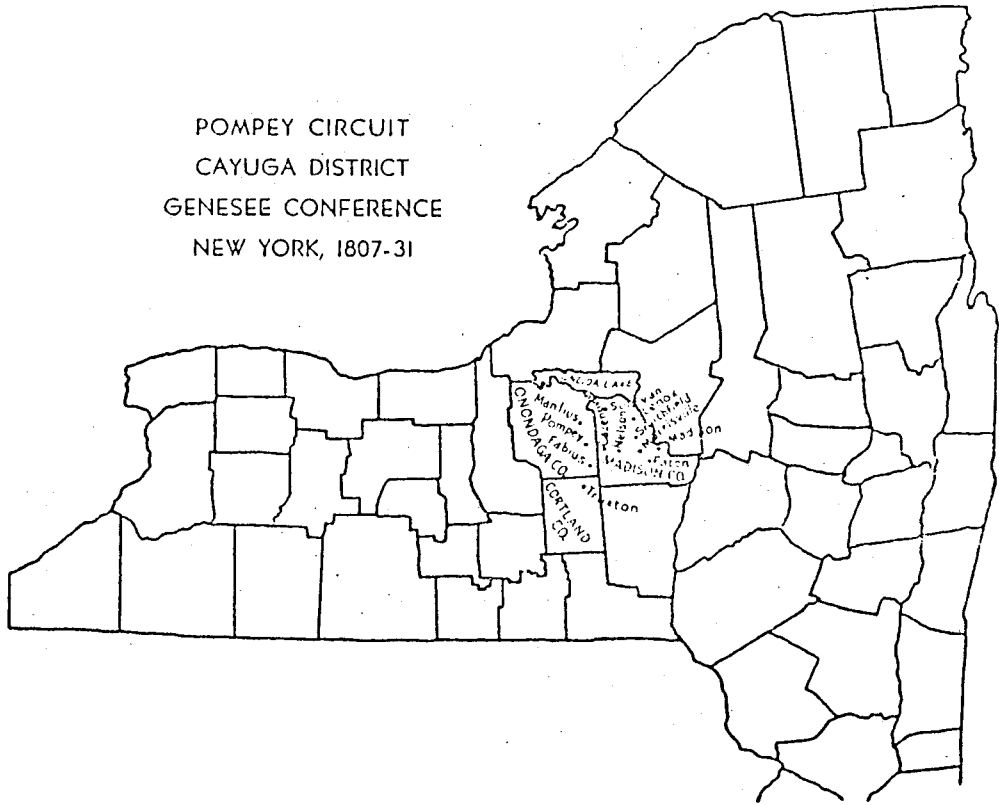
31. Smith, Recollections, p. 78. For other examples see, Ware, Memoir, pp. 158-59; Thrift, Jesse Lee, pp. 47, 123.



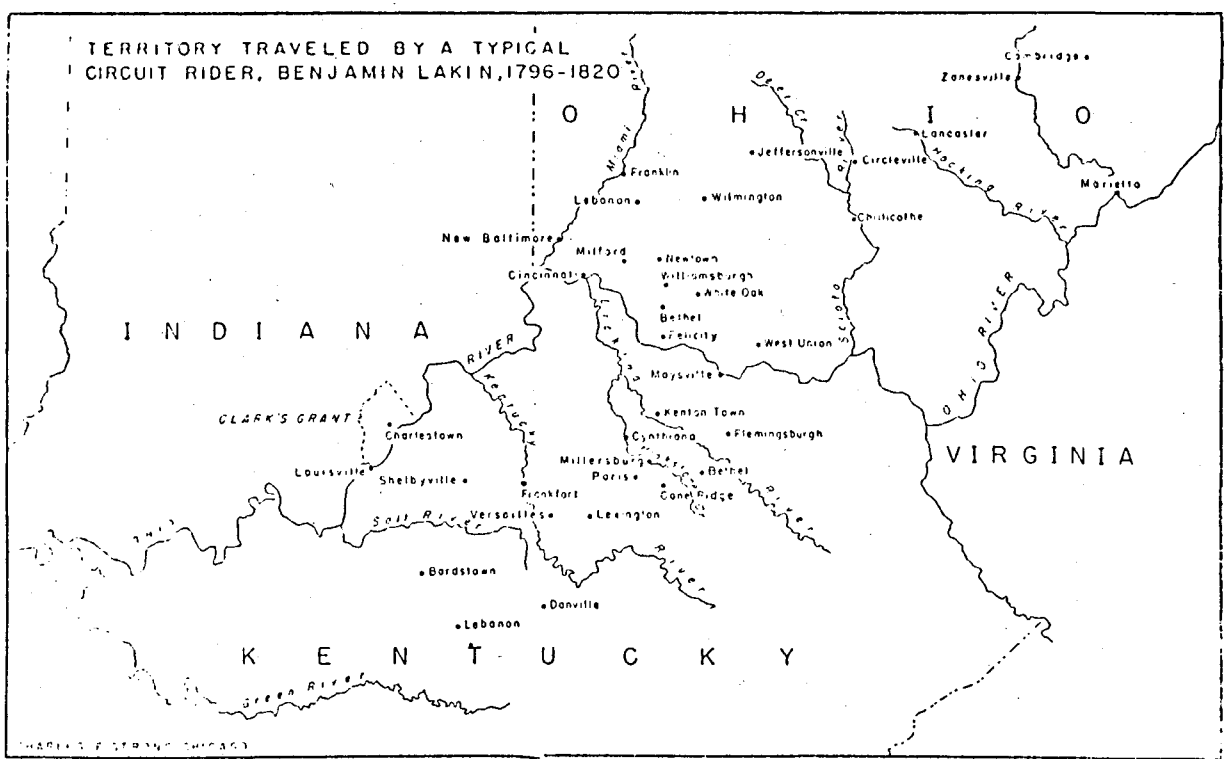
The Kentucky circuit traveled by Jacob Young as an itinerant on the Salt River Circuit, 1802.

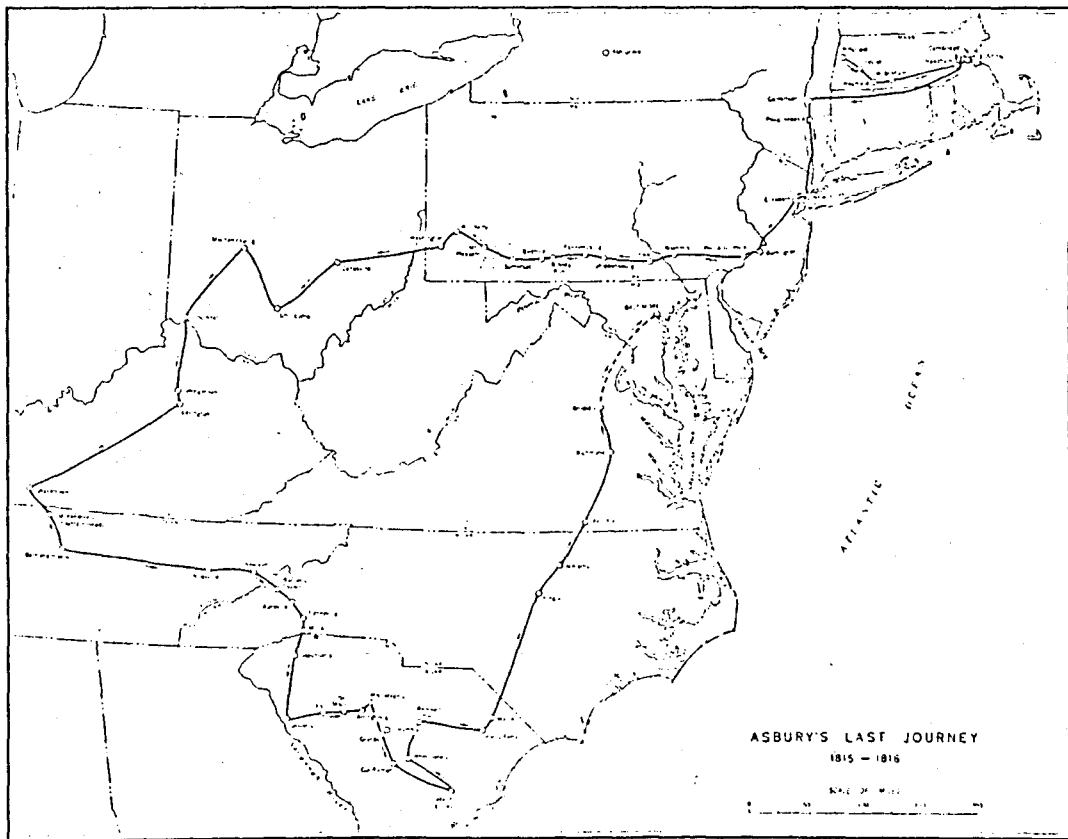
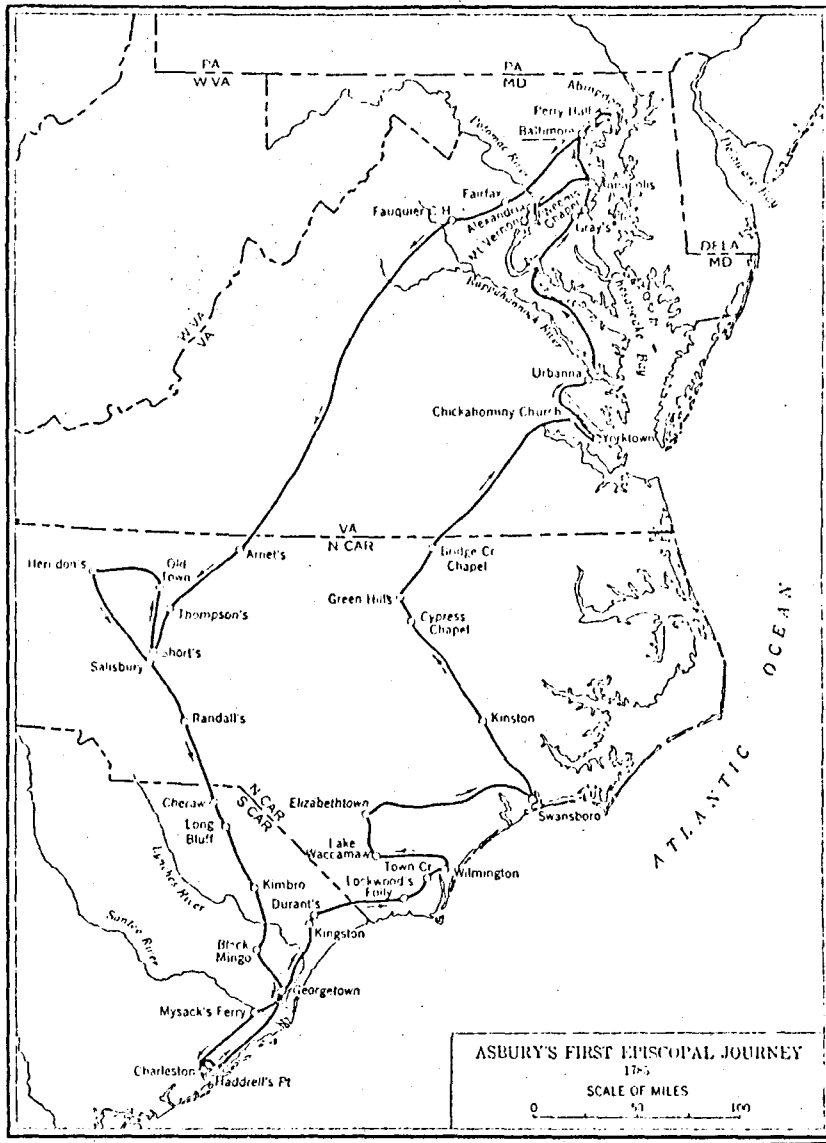


POMPEY CIRCUIT  
 CAYUGA DISTRICT  
 GENESEE CONFERENCE  
 NEW YORK, 1807-31



TERRITORY TRAVELED BY A TYPICAL  
 CIRCUIT RIDER, BENJAMIN LAKIN, 1796-1820





contention seldom served a useful purpose.<sup>32</sup>

Irreligious members of a community persecuted Methodist preachers. Joseph Travis was once confronted by local drunkards who threatened to dunk the preacher in a pond. It was not uncommon "to be threantened with stoning" in a region where Freeborn Garrettson traveled.<sup>33</sup> Another circuit-rider became the object of "peculiar hatred" in Orange County, Virginia, causing this Methodist itinerant to pray for God's protection. When a frontier citizen's wife was converted in a Methodist revival, her angry husband threatened to kill the preacher who was responsible for the woman's conversion. The minister prayed to God and was greatly relieved when the man was later converted.<sup>34</sup> The traveling preacher reluctantly accepted persecution as an unpleasant part of his ministry.

The Methodist minister constantly traveled. Each Methodist circuit-rider was equipped for the itinerancy. A good horse was of paramount importance to the preacher. The animal became the minister's constant companion and was always nurtured with "scrupulous care." A Methodist often dismounted and walked his horse when the animal's back became bruised from a heavy load.<sup>35</sup> His stead suffered when provisions were scarce.

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32. Asbury, Journal, 1 (February 17, 1791), p. 667.

33. Travis, Autobiography, pp. 53-54; Bangs, Freeborn Garrettson, p. 216.

34. F. E. Marine, Sketch of Rev. John Hersey, Minister of the Gospel, of the M. E. Church (Baltimore, Md.: Hoffman & Co., Printers, 1879), p. 68; Finley, Autobiography, p. 197.

35. Brown, Recollections, p. 78; Milburn, Ten Years, p. 90; Brunson, "Horseback Tour," p. 276.

Bishop Asbury's beast once became extremely weak from the lack of food and fell twice in a single day. "This hurt my feelings exceedingly," he wrote, "more than any circumstance I met with."<sup>36</sup> Henry Boehm allowed his horse to rest and graze in an open field; and most preachers provided food for their mounts even when fodder was expensive. A number of ministers became attached to their mounts. One western preacher described this intimacy:

Many a sermon have I preached to him. Whenever he heard the sound of my voice . . . , he would prick up his ears and seem to listen with . . . intense attention. I can say more for him than for some of my human auditors, to wit, that he never went to sleep while I was discoursing.<sup>37</sup>

Alfred Brunson had the same horse for over seven years. It was a sad occasion when an animal became seriously ill or died and the circuit-rider parted with such a close associate. In certain instances, itinerants "paid all the money" they had for a new horse; this was one item which the traveling minister could not do without.<sup>38</sup> A Methodist minister also was equipped with saddle-bags. In the pockets the itinerant deposited his possessions; a Bible, Church hymnal, tracts, religious books and additional clothing.

36. Asbury, Journal, 1 (July 13, 1782), p. 429.

37. Brown, Recollections, pp. 80-81; Boehm, Reminiscences, p. 238; Milburn, Ten Years, p. 54.

38. Brunson, "Horseback Tour," p. 267; Smith, Recollections, pp. 44-45; Burke, "Autobiography," in Finley, Western Methodism, p. 53. Quoted in James A. Hazlett, "The Troubles of the Circuit Rider," Missouri Historical Review, 39 (June, 1945), p. 424.

Methodist dress varied according to weather conditions. But, ministers in the denomination were noted for conservative fashion. Some preachers possessed only one suit of clothing; including, a shad-belly coat and a vest.<sup>39</sup> Every Methodist preacher owned a watch, an umbrella and a heavy overcoat for bad weather. Ministers usually wore boots and also owned at least one pair of shoes. They often possessed some form of hat for protection against the weather.<sup>40</sup> The Methodist itinerant's clothing was exposed to the elements and ministers were often too poor to purchase additional articles of dress. Thomas Ware "set out . . . poorly clad and nearly pennyless" on one circuit. "My coat was worn through," he exclaimed, "and I had not a whole under garment left; and as for boots, I had none."<sup>41</sup> William Burke, a western minister, was appointed one year to the Salt River Circuit in Ohio. "I had patch upon patch," the minister wrote as he described his mode of dress. When James B. Finley was stationed on the Wills Creek, Ohio circuit, he wore a blanket with a hole in the middle in place of an overcoat.<sup>42</sup> But, local Methodist members occasionally provided additional clothing for preachers.<sup>43</sup>

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39. Dailey, Thomas Smith, p. 34; Boehm, Reminiscences, p. 142.

40. Milburn, Saddle-Bags, pp. 56-57; Dailey, Thomas Smith, p. 34; Milburn, Ten Years, p. 51.

41. Posey, Frontier Mission, p. 108; Ware, Memoir, p. 161.

42. Finley, Western Methodism, p. 41; Autobiography, p. 193.

43. Beggs, West and North-West, pp. 68-69.

Both road and weather conditions were important factors during this era of American travel. Methodist itinerants were subject to numerous difficulties. Thomas Ware once journeyed in a western area where there were "no regular roads," and his trip was understandably trying. But, his experience was not peculiar to frontier travelers. In one of the eastern communities, Jesse Lee was forced to dismount and walk his horse along a narrow path.<sup>44</sup>

Itinerants journeyed in every conceivable type of weather in order to reach Methodist gatherings on time. Lee rode over fifteen miles on an "uncommonly warm" day and his trip was made more difficult by dust from the trail. His horse began to sweat profusely and the itinerant was hardly able to bear the smell. Lee's great coat and saddle-bags were "wet through" by the end of the journey. Thomas Coke, a Methodist Bishop, traveled more than eight hundred miles and did not encounter a single storm. But later he encountered a heavy rain for several days and the religious leader and his companions "were weted to the skin."<sup>45</sup> Other circuit-riders traveled during violent thunder showers in an effort to reach an appointment. Umbrellas offered ministers some protection from rain.<sup>46</sup> Travel was unusually difficult on wet roads and mud was a constant source of trouble.<sup>47</sup>

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44. Ware, Memoir, p. 143; Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 225.

45. Ibid., p. 119; Coke, Journals, p. 152.

46. James Gilruth, "Journal of James Gilruth, 1835-1836," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 376.

47. Boehm, Reminiscences, p. 277.

The winter season increased the preacher's problems. A dedicated Methodist minister from New York once traveled over thirty miles during a severe blizzard to reach the scheduled meeting. But, when he arrived, no one was there.

Alfred Brunson encountered a winter sleet storm in Wisconsin during the 1830's and "cakes of ice were formed" on his coat "near half an inch thick." His umbrella became much too heavy to carry, but too frozen to close. The Methodist

preacher dismounted and warmed himself at a fire for some time before he continued on his way.<sup>48</sup> Henry Smith was over-

taken by a "tremendous snowstorm" on the frontier during the early 1800's. The itinerant complained that his "lot was hard, and wept;" but the following day Smith preached to

a small congregation and one person was saved. The circuit-<sup>49</sup> rider learned the value of continuing in the face of trials.

When snow covered the ground preachers had problems distinguishing the road. Thomas Ware once waited an entire week in a

tavern before he continued on his rounds. A severe snowstorm had obliterated the landscape.<sup>50</sup> The impact of cold weather

was profound on men who traveled horseback many hours every week. During a winter ride Jesse Lee "felt so chilled" that he became certain his feet were frozen. Francis Asbury traveled less than ten miles to an appointment in 1773, but

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48. Peck, Early Methodism, p. 249; Brunson, "Horseback Tour," pp. 281-82.

49. Smith, Recollections, pp. 65-66.

50. Ware, Memoir, p. 127.

"never felt colder weather." The water froze as it ran from the nostrils of his horse. But, the religious leader preached to the small gathering of Methodists and then had to return to the place of his early morning departure.<sup>51</sup>

Itinerants had to devise means for crossing rivers since bridges were often unavailable. William A. Raper, a western pioneer preacher, forded streams on over thirty occasions during a single year. At times a minister paid an obliging citizen to "swim" his horse while he followed in a small boat. But, this method was too expensive for constant practice.<sup>52</sup> In Tidewater communities river were extremely wide so preachers searched for ferries. In 1790, Bishop Asbury crossed the James River near Jamestown in a skiff. But, these boats were often "tossed . . . by contrary winds" and he described the passage as "disagreeable and fatiguing."<sup>53</sup> Thomas Coke complained of the high ferry rates as he traveled through coastal areas.<sup>54</sup> River crossings were hazardous. More than one Methodist itinerant drowned in the process and the lives of others were seriously endangered. Benjamin Lakin's horse once panicked in the Scioto River in Ohio; but, the shaken preacher only lost his saddle-bags when the horse swam

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51. Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 204; Asbury, Journal, 1 (February 21, 1773), p. 70.

52. Finley, Western Methodism, p. 471; Peck, Early Methodism, p. 41.

53. Asbury, Journal, 1. (December 31, 1790 and May 29, 1775), pp. 659-60, 156-57.

54. Coke, Journals, p. 29.



to shore. Lakin took some time before he retrieved his saddle-bags and other possessions.<sup>55</sup>

During winter months, itinerants were exposed to cold weather. Preachers always encountered "great trouble in crossing a partly frozen river."<sup>56</sup> In many instances, swollen streams were impassable and the Methodist circuit-rider traveled additional miles "on account of the waters." Bishop Asbury, on one occasion, was twenty-five miles from the next day's appointment because of local floods. He "began to feel like fretting against persons and things." "O, My God!," the leader wrote, "Pardon me in this."<sup>57</sup> William Henry Milburn used a canoe to reach his meetings in Illinois during the 1840's when a portion of his circuit lay under water for "nearly a month."<sup>58</sup>

Methodist itinerants, as they traveled, also recognized the providential care of God and the beauty of nature. Bishop Richard Whatcoat journeyed in North Carolina during the late 1790's. He traveled a "fine and Levil" road which was "shaded by Statly pines" for forty miles. This scene so impressed the Methodist leader that he noted it in his journal.<sup>59</sup>

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55. Hibbard, Memoirs, p. 315; Finley, Western Methodism, p. 326; Lakin, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 233.

56. Peck, Early Methodism, p. 51.

57. Asbury, Journal, 1 (January 23-30, 1786 and July 5, 1780), pp. 506-07, 364.

58. Milburn, Ten Years, p. 98.

59. Whatcoat, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 93.

Salmon Stebbins traveled thirty miles on the Wisconsin frontier and encountered not a single inhabitant. The minister used this opportunity to admire the creation of God.<sup>60</sup>

During the late 1830's Alfred Brunson rode through a prairie in the old northwest and was impressed by its splendor.<sup>61</sup> William Henry Milburn noted this striking Illinois scene:

My first round upon the circuit began in that most gorgeous season of the year, the Indian summer. The rich mellowed sunshine stole lazily through the softening haze that filled the atmosphere, and crowned corn-fields and orchards and prairies with a golden glory unparalleled at any other time.<sup>62</sup>

Ministers confronted a variety of other road hazards. Henry B. Bascom was attacked by a mountain panther on one occasion as he rested near a forest, but the minister's traveling companion shot the beast before he reached his prey. Another circuit-rider from western New York killed two rattlesnakes during one year. One of the snakes nearly struck the preacher's horse before it was destroyed.<sup>63</sup> Edward Dromgoole, Jr. experienced a common American complaint; "I have been greatly troubled with flies, gnats & muscheters,"<sup>64</sup> he wrote from Ohio in 1807. The Indian menace on the

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60. Stebbins, "Journal," p. 204.

61. Brunson, "Horseback Tour," p. 275.

62. Milburn, Ten Years, p. 88.

63. Finley, Western Methodism, pp. 435-36; Peck, Early Methodism, p. 61.

64. Edward Dromgoole, Jr. to Edward Dromgoole, Sr., June 15, 1807 in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, pp. 162-63.

frontier was a source of trouble for more than one Methodist traveling minister.<sup>65</sup> Thomas Smith encountered a robber on one occasion, but the circuit-rider spurred his horse and escaped. He attributed his deliverance to the Lord. "I have been in perils of the wilderness," a Methodist preacher stated as he aptly summarized the characteristics of itinerant life, "in perils among venomous animals, in perils among the red man . . . ; and yet I live." This minister was not discouraged when he could "win souls to God!"<sup>66</sup>

Traveling preachers sometimes encamped in the wilderness. When homes and taverns were unavailable itinerants slept in the woods. Salmon Stebbins was overtaken by darkness one evening while he traveled his circuit. The Methodist minister halted, collected wood and built a fire. "After committing my safekeeping to Him who never sleeps," Stebbins wrote,<sup>67</sup> "I slept some--Wake some--and finally wore the night away." Henry Smith spent one evening "within hearing of an Indian camp." At midnight it began to rain steadily. Smith, in accordance with his companions, resumed the journey on horseback. Richard Whatcoat kindled a fire and was about to retire when a "Tremendous Storm of Lightnin thunder & Rain" nearly extinguished the flames and drenched the bishop. The Methodist

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65. Asbury, Journal, 1 (April 28-30, 1790), pp. 634-35; Beggs, West and North-West, pp. 88-89; Finley, Western Methodism, pp. 31-32.

66. Dailey, Thomas Smith, p. 117; Peck, Early Methodism, p. 242.

67. Stebbins, "Journal," p. 201.

leader exclaimed, "Oh that we May Reign with Christ in his  
 Glory!"<sup>68</sup> Henry B. Bascom slept in a hollowed out log one  
 night. But itinerants frequently arose refreshed despite  
 the effects of the wilderness.<sup>69</sup>

As the itinerant traveled, he encountered epidemics. Constant exposure decreased the minister's level of resistance. As a result, a number of preachers died while they traveled in the ministry.<sup>70</sup> Others suffered a serious loss of health. One year, a dangerous epidemic of cholera invaded Thomas Hudson's circuit. The Methodist minister escaped its influence and praised God for his deliverance. However, the same disease prevailed in Saint Louis, Missouri in 1835 and claimed the life of one Methodist minister stationed in the city.<sup>71</sup> In 1803, a yellow fever epidemic appeared at Norfolk and William Ormond, the preacher appointed to the southeastern Virginia city, became sick and later died. Another itinerant traveled through an area where "bilious and intermittent fevers prevailed." The minister became very "ill indeed," and did not recover his health for months.<sup>72</sup>

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68. Smith, Recollections, pp. 86-87; Whatcoat, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 98.

69. Henkle, Henry Bidleman Bascom, pp. 69-70; Peck, Early Methodism, p. 70.

70. McAnally, William Patton, p. 176.

71. Hudson, Life and Travels, pp. 131-34; Finley, Western Methodism, pp. 511-12.

72. Moore, Pioneers of Methodism, p. 253; Smith, Recollections, pp. 64-65.

Adverse weather threatened the health of a number of Methodist ministers. Jesse Lee "took a severe cold" while circuit-riding and the "exposure . . . brought on the rheumatism" for Henry Smith. Bad weather produced "severe attacks of bilious fever" in another preacher's life.<sup>73</sup> Methodist preachers often traveled despite their illnesses and increased the effects of a disease. Henry Boehm continued to ride thirty miles each day with cold winds at his back although he was so weak that his friends had to lift him onto his horse. Needless to say, it was some time before he completely recovered. Francis Asbury was sick for ten months; and yet he preached nearly three hundred sermons and rode two thousand miles during the same period. "O that my labour may not be in vain," he wrote.<sup>74</sup> Another minister had fevers for eighteen months; "But I pressed on!" he triumphantly exclaimed.<sup>75</sup> His statement exemplifies one Methodist preacher's sincere dedication.

When an itinerant became severely ill, he remained in a local Methodist member's home until he recovered. One preacher was "laid up" at one member's house for four weeks.<sup>76</sup> Methodist families applied home remedies to the minister in

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73. Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 60; Smith, Recollections, p. 87; Burke, "Autobiography," in Finley, Western Methodism, p. 89.

74. Boehm, Reminiscences, p. 274; Asbury, Journal, 1 (July 14, 1774), p. 122.

75. Smith, Recollections, pp. 64-65.

76. Dailey, Thomas Smith, p. 58.

hopes of his recovery. During this era "bleeding" was practiced and citizens used various applications, balms and salves for medicines. Henry Smith was "effectually cured . . . of the itch" through one such home remedy. Preachers also drank rhubarb and other potions on occasion.<sup>77</sup> Even when the itinerant was not cured through these means he greatly appreciated a family's hospitality.<sup>78</sup>

On the Methodist clergyman's long travels, he encountered many citizens and introduced religious conversation at every opportunity. Occasionally Americans were converted through this mode of preaching. Freeborn Garrettson, in the words of one minister, would "let no person escape a religious lecture that comes in his way."<sup>79</sup> Boldness characterized another Methodist circuit-rider in western New York. On one occasion this itinerant encountered an elderly man with a whiskey keg. "I could not leave him," the preacher stated, "without telling him of the evil of whiskey drinking." Although the old man was intoxicated, he received the reproof graciously.<sup>80</sup> Not every Methodist was this outspoken, but many recognized the importance of "witnessing" when they traveled. Francis Asbury had a life-long struggle with his lack of boldness.

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77. Smith, Recollections, p. 72; Asbury, Journal, 1 (November 19, 1785, January 23, 1772, April 10, 1792), pp. 498, 18, 711-12; Whatcoat, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 76.

78. Asbury, Journal, 1 (January 23, 1772), p. 18.

79. Watters, Ministerial Labours, p. 27; Dailey, Thomas Smith, p. 44; Asbury, Journal, 1 (May 5, 1780), p. 348.

80. Peck, Early Methodism, p. 46.

In the Bishop's own words, this fault was a result of his "natural bashfulness." In 1776, it was Asbury's "present determination to be more faithful in speaking to all that" fell in his way "about spiritual and eternal matters." The Methodist leader lamented his failure in this area in 1777<sup>81</sup> and again in 1792.<sup>82</sup> But, at times, Asbury overcame fear and spoke to citizens.

The traveling minister lodged with hospitable families, at taverns or with Methodists. It sometimes happened that a minister was treated with contempt by an entire community and was denied boarding. In the early 1800's, an irreligious family in western New York discovered that their guest was a Methodist preacher and asked him to leave as soon as possible.<sup>83</sup> But, this type of reception was atypical and circuit-riders were usually welcomed by American citizens. During his yearly rounds, the minister became acquainted with a majority of the home owners on his circuit.<sup>84</sup> If a family was not saved, the Methodist itinerant "spoke of religion" and "preached to them." Peter Cartwright lodged with an irreligious family one evening, but, in a short time, he led them into the faith.<sup>85</sup>

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81. Asbury, Journal, 1 (July 23, 1777, April 25, 1776, July 23, 1777, February 25, 1792), pp. 244, 185, 707-08.

82. *Ibid.*, (October 19, 1772, January 30, 1773, July 1, 1773, October 27, 1780, November 28, 1783), pp. 47, 68, 83, 385, 449.

83. Ware, Memoir, pp. 144-47; Peck, Early Methodism, p. 41.

84. Thrift, Jesse Lee, pp. 114, 276; Milburn, Ten Years p. 81.

85. Cartwright, Autobiography, pp. 122-23.

On rare occasions, a minister was invited to board with members of other denominations. Henry Smith spent one evening with a "kind Presbyterian family." Doctrinal strife was avoided in these instances.<sup>86</sup> The traveling minister sometimes spent the evening at a tavern, but this practice was too expensive for frequent repetition. Methodist preachers also objected to the evil atmosphere often found at an inn.<sup>87</sup>

Many Methodist homes were well known for hospitality. These houses were termed: "An excellent home for a wayworn itinerant," or "a standing home for the preachers."<sup>88</sup> Methodist members solicited circuit ministers many times.<sup>89</sup> Itinerants described their reception at one of these lodgings in a variety of ways: "bidding us welcome with fervent affection," "treated with . . . kindness and hospitality," "received me with every expression of joy," "received us kindly."<sup>90</sup>

Constant travel prepared the circuit rider for his diet. In this era, Methodist preachers ate a variety of foods. Frequently, ministers were forced to travel without eating and had to fast through the lack of proper provisions.<sup>91</sup> The

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86. Smith, Recollections, p. 312.

87. Brunson, "Horseback Tour," p. 271; Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 73; Asbury, Journal, 1 (March 4, 1790), p. 627; Burke, "Autobiography," in Finley, Western Methodism, p. 87.

88. Boehm, Reminiscences, p. 70; William B. Landrum, The Life and Travels of the Rev. William Landrum (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1878), p. 85.

89. Elizabeth Russell to Stith Mead, February 21, 1794 in Stith Mead MS Letterbook, 1793-1795, pp. 55-56. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

90. Asbury, Journal, 1 (October 27, 1771), pp. 6-7; Smith Recollections, pp. 311-13; Watters, Ministerial Labours, p. 23.

91. Milburn, Ten Years, pp. 57-58; Peck, Early Methodism, p. 43; Asbury, Journal, 1 (March 23, June 21, 1783), pp. 439-43.



following list represents the variety of meals Methodist circuit-riders encountered: "Swine's-flesh," "Shad-fish," "bacon, eggs and Indian corn bread," "Hog, hominey and pone," "fried chicken and saleratus biscuits," "squirrel, coffee and buttermilk," "bearmeat and buffalo tongues," and "bread and potatoes."<sup>92</sup>

The Methodist minister often slept under unfavorable circumstances even in homes. "When we went to bed," one preacher exclaimed, "it was not to sleep, but to suffer."<sup>93</sup> The circuit-rider was often troubled with insects that invaded open houses during the night. A Methodist minister in the old northwest remained awake an entire night fighting the "musketoes." Henry Smith rested on a pair of bearskins in one home, but his covers were inhabited by bed bugs which made sleep all but impossible.<sup>94</sup> Itinerants encountered other hazards. Francis Asbury slept on hard floors for several weeks while he rode over thirty miles each day. The Bishop longed for a more comfortable rest.<sup>95</sup> Ministers often rested in a loft among chickens, broken tools, piles of potatoes and other odds and ends. Here a preacher slept where he "could view the stars through openings in the roof, and

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92. Coke, Journals, pp. 38, 105; Milburn, Ten Years, p. 91; Landrum, Life and Travels, p. 137; Burke, "Autobiography," in Finley, Western Methodism, p. 34; Peck, Early Methodism, p. 68.

93. Hudson, Life and Travels, pp. 100-01.

94. Beggs, West and North-West, p. 114; Smith, Recollections, p. 319.

95. Asbury, Journal, 1 (July 20, 1781), p. 409.

sometimes in the morning" he awoke "covered with snow" or  
<sup>96</sup>rain. Comfortable lodgings were seldom available to  
 a horseback preacher.

Family prayer was an important activity according to  
 Methodist ministers. As itinerants traveled among American  
 citizens they encouraged this religious practice.<sup>97</sup> Every  
 preacher occasionally lodged with families to whom prayer  
 was foreign. But, when possible, the itinerant conducted  
 a home service and in some instances this was done over pro-  
 tests by members of the household. Francis Asbury spent the  
 night at an irreligious home in 1771 and led the family in  
 worship at evening and again before breakfast, but the father  
 protested his services and stated, "it was not well to be  
 too religious." The Methodist leader departed immediately  
 following the morning meal.<sup>98</sup> Yet citizens were often more  
 open to Methodist religion.

James B. Finley visited a Catholic family in Ohio during  
 the early 1800's and the entire household was converted through  
 family prayer. Another itinerant was called upon to settle  
 a dispute and instruct the family concerning the Methodist  
 faith. The minister's counsel became apparent to the relatives

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96. Finley, Autobiography, p. 235; Milburn, Ten Years,  
 p. 93; Joseph Snelling, Life of Rev. Joseph Snelling, Being a  
 Sketch of His Christian Experience and Labors in the Ministry  
 (Boston, Published by John M'Leish, 1847), p. 61.

97. Cartwright, Autobiography, pp. 334-35; Finley,  
Western Methodism, pp. 293-94, 318; Dailey, Thomas Smith, p. 106.

98. Asbury, Journal, 1 (December 8, 1771), p. 12.

who considered joining the Church. When preachers stayed with Methodists, they all "improved the evening the way Christians should; in prayer, singing, reading the word, and exhortations."<sup>99</sup> Henry Smith once visited a Methodist household and joined in the home worship service. "The Lord was present in power" he explained; and a small scale revival commenced. This practice of family worship was the secret of a successful Church.<sup>100</sup>

At the year's end, the Methodist minister was appointed to a new circuit. It was often difficult for the itinerant to leave Methodists he had served during the previous year. Thomas Hudson cried when he left his circuit in Pennsylvania and prayed that the converts would continue in the faith. When Francis Asbury left a community, he warned the people and preached from the text: "I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men."<sup>101</sup> James B. Finley, Jesse Lee and Benjamin Lakin also experienced sorrow when they left their respective circuits. "May the Lord bring us to meet in heaven," a clergyman prayed, "where parting is no more."<sup>102</sup>

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99. Finley, Autobiography, pp. 194-96; Lakin, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, pp. 224-25; Asbury, Journal, 2 (November 4, 1797), p. 138.

100. Smith, Recollections, p. 315.

101. Hudson, Life and Travels, pp. 40-41; Asbury, Journal, (May 15, 1774), p. 115.

102. Finley, Autobiography, p. 233; Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 76; Lakin, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 209.

Why did the Methodist preachers continue in the ministry amidst such trials? The answer to this question is found in discovering the way itinerants defended circuit life. First, Methodist preachers believed that God had called them to proclaim the gospel. They realized that this duty could not be performed without travel. This divine commission calmed most ministers' doubts concerning the validity of the itinerancy.<sup>103</sup> The Church taught that God allowed tribulation to perfect a Christian's religious life. The sufferings which accompanied travel prepared ministers for greater reward and spiritual growth.<sup>104</sup> The final and perhaps most important factor, ministers were motivated by the desire to carry the message of salvation to all. On one occasion there was "little rest" for Bishop Asbury and his companions. The Methodist leader's thinking at this point reflects the missionary spirit: "But souls are perishing--time is flying--and eternity comes nearer every hour."<sup>105</sup> The Methodist minister learned to adjust to the privations that accompanied his life in the itinerancy. This process took time and was mentally painful in more than one instance. "My merciful God!" William Watters exclaimed,<sup>106</sup> "keep me from offering unto thee the sacrifice of self-murder." Methodist circuit-riders were drawn to one another as they

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103. Finley, Western Methodism, p. 146.

104. Asbury, Journal, 1 (July 27, 1780), p. 370.

105. *Ibid.*, (August 2, 1780), p. 371.

106. Watters, Ministerial Labours, p. 55.

suffered; but the ministers were assured, in one itinerant's words, "that the Lord was with us." <sup>107</sup> The presence of God encouraged the preachers to continue despite the hardships they endured.

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107. Finley, Western Methodism, p. 58; Smith, Recollections, p. 40.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE ITINERANT PREACHER AND METHODIST MEETINGS

Francis Asbury preached in the Westchester Courthouse, near New York City, about two months after his arrival in America. "I judged that my audience needed to be taught the first principles of religion," the zealous young Methodist wrote. He preached on the subject of repentance and commanded obedience to the demands of God's word. "Seriousness sat on the faces of my hearers," Asbury wrote, "and the power of God came both on me and them." <sup>1</sup> During the following seventy years Asbury and his "sons" in the ministry preached conversion as a Christian reality to millions of Americans. The Methodist meeting was the focal point where itinerants delivered the message of salvation. The circuit rider's sermon was the most important event in the meeting.

Methodists advertised their religious services. The Church usually welcomed all citizens and both members and ministers invited neighbors to attend. William Henry Milburn once entered a village of over twenty homes and his traveling companion immediately mounted a barrel and shouted, "Oyez! Oyez! take notice that Brother . . . Milburn will preach in the meeting-house to-morrow night at early candlelighting!" <sup>2</sup> A number of citizens responded and attended the service.

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1. Asbury, Journal, 1 (November 23, 1771), p. 11.

2. Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 123; Milburn, Ten Years, p. 61.

The Methodist Church, through invitations of this type, reached most of the population in a community.

Circuit-riders held meetings in many places. The greatness of Methodism, they maintained, did not consist in the sanctity of a meeting place, but rather in true religious zeal. Methodists, on many occasions, simply gathered to worship in homes. The furniture was rearranged and a preacher conducted the service.<sup>3</sup> But, ministers also preached in schools, local court houses, small chapels and churches.<sup>4</sup> When larger crowds attended, the circuit preacher held services in barns, fields, under trees or outside stores.<sup>5</sup> Methodist ministers preached almost every day and conducted more than one service on Sunday. The earliest time for meeting was sunrise and the latest service began after sunset; but, circuit-riders had religious meetings at any hour from 5:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M. Many persons attended the gatherings at morning, noon or night to receive spiritual instruction.<sup>6</sup>

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3. For examples of home meetings consult, Asbury, Journal, 1 (November 10, 1771), p. 8; Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 182; Peck, Early Methodism, p. 164.

4. For school meetings see, Smith, Recollections, p. 322; Peck, Early Methodism, p. 164; Asbury, Journal, 1 (May 20 and November 1, 1772), pp. 31, 49. For meetings in court houses see, Peck, ibid; Thrift, Jesse Lee, pp. 83, 192, 199; Asbury, Journal, 1 (November 6, 1771), p. 8.

5. Some examples of each of these places are found in Peck, Early Methodism, pp. 164, 191, 194; Asbury, Journal, 1 (June 1, 9 and August 16, 1780; September 22, 1781), pp. 355-56, 373, 411; Thrift; Jesse Lee, pp. 65, 108; Bangs, Freeborn Garrettsen, p. 103.

6. The Journal of Francis Asbury is a good source for the various days and times of Methodist meetings in this era.

During the early part of the nineteenth century Methodist preachers helped to introduce the camp meeting -- a new form of religious gathering. The Church, in the next four decades, became the main exponent of this institution. Citizens were exposed to Methodist doctrines through hymns, exhortations and sermons. The denomination held most camp meetings in September (after harvest) and continued the affair for several days. Over a thousand persons often attended and conversions were numerous. This gathering became both a religious and social event for citizens in frontier and eastern communities.<sup>7</sup>

Ministers also conducted restricted services and only admitted Methodists. The need for intimate personal fellowship between members was the significant factor in this exclusion policy. It was "improper," according to one early Methodist writer, "to have many people among us where we were speaking of our experiences and of the deep things of God."<sup>8</sup> Circuit-riders enforced this Church rule. Even Methodists did not remain sincerely dedicated and were occasionally banned from meetings of this type. But, when backsliders

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7. For contemporary accounts of Methodist activity in the camp meeting movement consult, Milburn, Ten Years, pp. 61-64; Smith, Recollections, pp. 54-61; Boehm, Reminiscences, pp. 147-60; Burke, "Autobiography," in Finley, Western Methodism, pp. 76-79. Two important monographs on the camp meeting are Charles A. Johnson, The Frontier Camp-Meeting; Religion's Harvest Time (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955); Dickson D. Bruce, And They All Sang Hallelujah; Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1974).

8. Lee, History of the Methodists, p. 48.



repented ministers "sympathized with, and forgave them."<sup>9</sup>

The intimate Methodist gatherings were called class meetings, band meetings and watch-night services. The Methodist class, a meeting of a portion of the local church, was popular. The entire local congregation was divided into many classes. In these meetings, each member related the trials, temptations and triumphs of his faith which occurred in the preceding week. The small group prayed for a member when he requested help. The Methodist band was similar in form to the class; but, the band meeting was smaller and more personal in nature. Through these two gatherings individual Methodists became conscious of their part in a religious body.<sup>10</sup> The watch-night service, a gathering of Methodists for prayer, was held on rare occasions. These meetings continued till  
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midnight or later.

At open Methodist services, the audience varied in number and in sexual, racial and social makeup. During the harvest season a week day congregation might consist of only three

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9. For examples of this practice see, McAnally, William Patton, pp. 55-56; Brown, Recollections, pp. 95-97. Quoted in Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 242. A secondary account of Methodist discipline is Bruce, They All Sang, pp. 48-50.

10. For accounts of these services consult, Finley, Autobiography, pp. 240-41, 268; Peck, Early Methodism, p. 47; Smith, Recollections, p. 320; Thrift, Jesse Lee, pp. 55-57; Burke, "Autobiography," in Finley, Western Methodism, p. 76; Whatcoat, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 116; Asbury, Journal, 1 (June 7, 1772 and March 18, 1792), pp. 33, 703. A secondary work is Frank Baker, Methodism and the Love Feast (London: Epworth Press, 1957).

11. Dailey, Thomas Smith, p. 45; Whatcoat, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 79.

aged women; but this was the smallest group which the circuit-rider encountered. In some instances, when the "notice" for meeting was "very short," only a few citizens attended worship.<sup>12</sup> However, many persons usually attended Methodist gatherings. It is extremely difficult to estimate the average Methodist crowd. More than a thousand persons came to camp meetings. But, most services contained smaller groups. The following list reflects the variety: "between 40 and 50 present," "about one hundred people," "about two hundred willing people," "about three hundred hearers," "five or six hundred."<sup>13</sup> This author estimates the number at an average Methodist meeting somewhere between fifty and two hundred. The number of a crowd depended on the time, place and day of meeting. More people came to Sunday services. Men and women were admitted to meetings, but often sat in separate sections. The Church allowed blacks to enter some chapels but they were seated in segregated places. Only a few affluent persons attended meetings.<sup>14</sup>

The format for a Methodist service was quite simple. During this era the human voice dominated popular church meetings. Methodists despised silent rituals. The circuit-rider occasionally baptized members and conducted communion, but

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12. Milburn, Ten Years, p. 90; Coke, Journals, p. 14.

13. Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 182; Asbury, Journal, 1 (June 3-4, 1772), p. 33; 2 (November 11, 1795), p. 66; I (September 29, 1776), p. 201.

14. Saint-Mery, "Norfolk," p. 155; Asbury, Journal, 1 (November 17, 1771 and September 17, 1776), pp. 9-10, 200; Boehm, Reminiscences, p. 138; Hudson, Life and Times, p. 39.

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 otherwise his ministry was vocal. Once a group gathered, the minister began the service and led the congregation as they sang hymns. Stith Mead, in his introduction to one Methodist Hymnal, summarized the benefits of worship: "Singing to the praise of God with devotional attention, is often attended with the most happy consequences. . . . Preaching and prayer will cease at death--but singing is the employment of the glorified, and will continue forever."<sup>16</sup> Methodist hymns were often descriptions of the salvation process. "O for a Thousand Tongues" was one popular Methodist song in this time:

O for a thousand tongues to sing,  
 My great Redeemer's praise;  
 The glories of my God and King,  
 The triumphs of His grace.

My gracious Master and my God,  
 Assist me to proclaim;  
 To spread through all the earth abroad,  
 The honors of Thy name.

Jesus!--the name that charms our fears,  
 And bids our sorrows cease;  
 'Tis music in the sinner's ear,  
 'Tis life and health and peace.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,  
 He sets the prisoner free;  
 His blood can make the vilest clean,  
 His blood availed for me.

Hear him ye deaf, His praise ye dumb,  
 Your loosened tongues employ;  
 Ye blind behold your Saviour come,  
 And leap ye lame for joy.<sup>17</sup>

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15. Gilruth, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 376; Whatcoat, "Journal," in Ibid, p. 88; Snelling, Life, pp. 53-54; Bangs, Freeborn Garrettson, p. 222.

16. Mead, Hymns and Spiritual Songs, pp. iii, iv.

17. Bruce, They All Sang, p. 96. The hymn is found in

As the service continued, the traveling preacher prayed for the blessing of God on the sermon. The minister than preached to the congregation.

The traveling preacher's sermon was the central event of every Methodist service. A number of important factors motivated the circuit-riders to proclaim the gospel. It was important, Church leaders taught, for ministers to preach with godly motives. Methodist preachers who gave God praise for using their efforts for his glory were esteemed as useful servants of the Church; but, circuit ministers who desired honor for themselves were bad examples. The Church encouraged its preachers to say, "if any good is done, to God be all the glory," before and after each sermon. <sup>18</sup> Traveling ministers stood before a congregation with the knowledge that in a short time each person would give an account of his or her life to God. Preachers desired the salvation of the entire audience. The impact of this thinking was profound in the case of Francis Asbury. His thoughts reflect the concern of most Methodist itinerants for citizens:

Though I feel some concern for the souls of my fellow men, yet not enough. If we could but see by faith the danger to which poor unpardoned sinners are continually exposed, if we could but have a realizing view of that unquenchable fire into which they must be plunged, dying in their present state, how could we rest day or night from using all possible endeavours to prevent their eternal damnation?

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A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Published by N. Bangs, and T. Mason, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1821), p. 7.

18. Peck, Early Methodism, p. 49.

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"It is the life of my soul," he wrote on another occasion,<sup>19</sup>  
 "to be labouring for the salvation of mankind."

This inward motivation produced outward emotional responses in many circuit-riders. In one instance a traveling minister arose to preach and was "so overcome with . . . the worth of souls" and of his "responsibility, as a minister. . . , that it was some time before" he uttered a word.<sup>20</sup> Another Methodist itinerant often "wept during preaching."<sup>21</sup> Through the proclamation of the gospel the Methodist minister maintained a clear conscience before both God and man.

Circuit-riders prepared for a sermon in a variety of ways. The Methodist traveling system provided preachers with opportunities to use the same discourse on many different occasions. A sermon improved in style, content and effectiveness through abundant repetition. The Church encouraged itinerants to use personal examples drawn from their religious experience as they addressed congregations. Denominational leaders believed that American citizens responded to practical religious appeal.<sup>22</sup> Ministers also prepared for speaking through Bible study and prayer. "When you go into the pulpit,"

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19. Milburn, Pioneers and Preachers, pp. 366-67; Saddle-Bags, p. 59; Asbury, Journal, 1 (July 7, 1775 and June 13, 1776), pp. 159, 189.

20. Snelling, Life, p. 88.

21. Seth Crowell, The Journal of Seth Crowell, Containing an Account of His Travels as a Methodist Preacher for Twelve Years (New York; Printed by John C. Totten, 1813), p. 51.

22. Milburn, Ten Years, pp. 41, 92.

a bishop once instructed a group of circuit-riders when they entered the ministry, "go from your closets."<sup>23</sup> Practice, personal experience, Bible study and prayer all prepared Methodist ministers for the task of preaching.

In their sermons, Methodists emphasized certain doctrines. Circuit-riders were evangelical and preached that salvation was available to everyone. They rejected any notion of unconditional election as taught by the Calvinists. In his sermons, Peter Cartwright assured sinners that "the happy gates of Gospel grace" were "open night and day and that Christ" would turn "none away."<sup>24</sup> Another Methodist evangelist taught a "full and free salvation to all."<sup>25</sup> God, in his mercy, provided redemption through Christ; but, those who rejected grace would face God in their sinful condition and receive divine judgement. Through various means Methodists awakened citizens to the danger of their unconverted state. James B. Finley always "labored to show the audience that they were on their way to hell, and as insensible of their danger as though locked fast in the embrace of sleep."<sup>26</sup>

The traveling minister preached present conviction as a means to alarm sinners. The minister instructed the congregation of the danger which accompanied the violation of a

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23. Finley, Western Methodism, pp. 97-98. See also, Bangs, Freeborn Garrettson, pp. 55-56; Dailey, Thomas Smith, pp. 50-51.

24. Cartwright, Autobiography, p. 275.

25. Finley, Western Methodism, p. 100.

26. Finley, Autobiography, p. 229.

divine commandment. In one sermon, Thomas Coke described the law as a "hammer to break hearts with."<sup>27</sup> Circuit-riders used the ten commandments and preached against specific sins, such as; conforming dress, whiskey, horseracing, theater, gambling and dancing.<sup>28</sup> The preacher then showed his audience the "utter impossibility" of escape from God's justice.<sup>29</sup> John Strange, (1789-1834), a western Methodist spoke on this subject during one sermon. His exhortation is a typical Methodist warning to sinners:

When the thrones are set, and the dead, small and great, shall stand before the Lord, is there one here whose name shall not be found written in the Lamb's book of life? Forbid it, Lord! If there is one here who has never tasted of the joys of salvation, I warn him by the terrors of that day to flee the wrath to come . . . ; behold! now is the day of salvation.<sup>30</sup>

Conviction created tension between the sinner's present worldly existence and his desire for a religious life. The

27. Quoted in Charles A. Rogers, "The Theological Heritage of the Early Methodist Preachers," Duke Divinity School Review, 34 (August, 1969), pp. 197-98.

28. For examples of this type of preaching consult, Strickland, Jacob Gruber, pp. 76-86; Finley, Western Methodism, pp. 239-40; Autobiography, pp. 248-52. For a secondary account see, Bruce, They All Sang, p. 47.

29. Finley, Western Methodism, p. 340. One of Asbury's sermons on judgement is as follows: "I. To prove that the judgement will be universal. II. To describe the person of the Judge. III. To describe the awful events preceding and attending that period. IV. To point out the business of the day. V. To show the decision and consequences." Journal, 1 (September 27, 1772), p. 44. Ezekiel Cooper also preached on wrath. Henry Beohm was present and wrote, "He dwelt not only upon wrath--divine wrath--but particularly 'wrath to come;' taking the sinner onward and showing that to all eternity it would be wrath to come! future wrath, increasing wrath." Beohm, Reminiscences, p.183.

30. Finley, Western Methodism, p. 403.

sincere "mourner" waited for salvation.<sup>31</sup>

The circuit-rider encouraged those under conviction to seek God's mercy. He taught them how the Holy Spirit converted those who truly repented. The preacher told the mourner to rely on Christ's power to assure him of the forgiveness of sins and of his place in heaven. Jesse Lee preached the possibility of this sudden change, "from a state of sin to a state of grace."<sup>32</sup> Every Methodist experienced conversion before he became a member of the denomination and was "ushered into the New Jerusalem."<sup>33</sup> Conversion was the root of the Methodist circuit minister's message of salvation.

The doctrine of sanctification was also preached regularly by Methodist circuit-riders. They taught Methodists that the "second blessing"--holiness of heart--was available to all converts. When the minister preached on the topic of "Christian Perfection", he pressed members to higher moral, religious and ethical standards of conduct.<sup>34</sup> In these sermons preachers attacked deep rooted sins such as pride, envy, self-will and bitterness which remained in the believer after his conversion. These sins were removed from the Christian's heart when he surrendered to the love of God.

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31. Bruce, They All Sang, p. 61.

32. Ibid., pp. 66-67. Some persons reacted adversely to this kind of preaching. Lee stated, "These people don't like to hear that there is something for men to do; they had rather be told to sit still, and wait for Christ to call them with an irresistable call." Thrift, Jesse Lee, pp. 117-131.

33. Finley, Western Methodism, p. 403.

34. Crowell, Journal, p. 54.



In one minister's words, the goal of religious perfection prevented Methodists from "settling on their lees."<sup>35</sup> The traveling preacher strove to teach members all things necessary for holiness. He encouraged Bible study, prayer and family worship as important duties for zealous Christians.<sup>36</sup>

Methodist doctrine did not fluctuate from preacher to preacher, or from sermon to sermon. But, the manner of delivering doctrine varied in some details according to the individual circuit-rider's talent. Even one minister's sermons differed in length and in quality of presentation from one discourse to the next. These details, including the length of sermons, style of preaching and ability of speakers, were factors which shaped a Methodist discourse.

Many Methodist circuit-riders were long winded. A sermon lasted for over two hours on numerous occasions.<sup>37</sup> Some ministers became famous for the time they "held forth." Peter Akers, (1790-1886) an Illinois Methodist, preached from three to five hours on occasions! When this Methodist preacher came to Lexington, Kentucky the congregation placed a time limit on his message. The circuit-rider complied for a number of months, but the region experienced a religious decline. Akers "resolved to throw away the muzzle" and a

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35. Asbury, Journal, 1 (January 23, 1782 and January 10, 1773), pp. 418, 66.

36. Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 83; Asbury, Journal, 1 (June 9, 1774), pp. 118.

37. Bangs, Freeborn Garrettson, p. 62; Thrift, Jesse Lee, pp. 83, 126; Asbury, Journal, 1 (December 12, 1776), p. 206.

great revival commenced in Lexington. After this the local Methodist church removed all restrictions.<sup>38</sup> William Henry Milburn once entered a church service at 8:00 A.M. and did not leave the building until 5:00 that afternoon. He heard two extended discourses during this meeting.<sup>39</sup> The audience became persuaded of the truth of Methodist doctrine when forced to consider the content at length.

Many Methodist ministers spoke quite loudly during a sermon. There are a number of explanations for this form of speaking. Sometimes, Methodists desired to draw a large crowd and shouted their message. When a gathering was extremely large a minister often spoke so as to be heard by the entire audience. Some circuit-riders preached loudly to emphasize a particular topic.<sup>40</sup> When Freeborn Garrettson spoke, citizens could hear him for over a quarter of a mile and Billy Hibbard could be "heard distinctly half a mile."<sup>41</sup> A number of audiences did not appreciate a sermon preached in this manner and some members complained. A Methodist approached Joseph Travis after one service and exhorted him to have "more faith and less noise."<sup>42</sup> A group of members requested that Jesse

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38. Milburn, Ten Years, p. 52; T. Walter Johnson, "Peter Akers, Methodist Circuit Rider and Educator, 1790-1886," in Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, 32 (December, 1939), p. 429.

39. Milburn, Saddle-Bags, p. 73.

40. Mark Brooks Lloyd, "A Rhetorical Analysis of the Preaching of Bishop Francis Asbury," Unpublished Dissertation, Michigan State University, 1967 (Anne Arbor, Michigan; University Microfilms, Inc., 1976), p. 228.

41. Bangs, Freeborn Garrettson, p. 83; Hibbard, Memoir, p. 227.

42. Travis, Autobiography, p. 41.

Lee lower his voice, for his preaching caused their heads to ache. But, the Methodist stated, "I hope God will help me to speak hereafter, so as to make their hearts ache."<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps, this trend of loud preaching was established by the early American Methodist leader, Francis Asbury, who was noted for this type of discourse.<sup>44</sup>

Many traveling ministers preached demonstrative sermons. They used the entire body as they spoke and acted out the message of Methodism. The best minister was one who commanded attention in the pulpit. Phillip Gatch, one Methodist remembered, was successful because he relied on "power from above."<sup>45</sup> Henry Smith attributed Methodist success in America to the "excellency of the power" which attended their meetings. The demonstrative style of preaching was a catalyst for the release of this power. It touched the emotions of the audience and produced godly reactions.

Barnabas McHenry, a western minister, described the "glories of heaven" and the "glooms of hell" so vividly and with such force that it made "all hearts feel their reality."<sup>47</sup> Some preachers carried this mode of discourse to extremes. One minister from New York clapped his hands, lifted a chair

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43. Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 120.

44. Lloyd, "Rhetorical Analysis," pp. 227-28.

45. Milburn, Preachers and People, pp. 368-69; Smith, Recollections, p. 311.

46. Ibid., p. 50.

47. Finley, Western Methodism, p. 150.

and dashed it down until everything in the house moved during one message. Then he exclaimed to the audience, "Sinners! You are chained; if you run from the power of God the devil will have you."<sup>48</sup> He drew the attention of the congregation to his sermon even if he did not produce the intended response in his hearers. Other Methodists were solemn and grave when they preached although they too demonstrated particular points of a sermon with their bodies. Bishop Asbury spoke in Baltimore in 1808 to an attentive crowd on the duties of parents to children. He reproved those who willfully neglected the duty and suddenly paused:

'But you will say it is hard. Alas," he added, letting his voice, which had been raised in a high, commanding tone which gave such a majesty to what he uttered, suddenly fall to a low and soft key, "It is harder to be damned!"

The audience was moved to tears by his statement and a small revival occurred. Jesse Lee wept as he preached and thereby influenced the congregation to repent.<sup>49</sup> Peter Cartwright was especially active and forceful in the pulpit as he spoke to western citizens who thoroughly enjoyed his antics.<sup>50</sup>

A minister adjusted his sermon to reflect current

48. Peck, Early Methodism, p. 73.

49. Boehm, Reminiscences, p. 443; Lloyd, "Rhetorical Analysis," p. 249; Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 59.

50. Cartwright had a "voice which, in his prime, was capable of almost every modulation, the earnest force and homely directness of his speech, and his power over the passions of the human heart, made him an orator to win . . . the sympathies of a western audience." Milburn, Ten Years, pp. 41-42.

events well-known to his congregation. Through this technique, the circuit-rider commanded the immediate attention of the people. "A minister's skill and wisdom are exhibited as much in the selection of his texts as in expounding them," Henry Boehm declared. "Adaptation is the great secret of success."<sup>51</sup> Learner Blackmun (1781-1815) traveled with Andrew Jackson's Army during the early part of the War of 1812. The first night he addressed the officers and chose Matthew 10:28 as his text: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."<sup>52</sup> In September, 1772, Francis Asbury came unexpectedly on a group of Methodists and preached from these words: "In such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh."<sup>53</sup>

A Methodist circuit-rider's sermons varied in quality of presentation from meeting to meeting. Some traveling ministers were influential speakers and drew large crowds. Inexperienced preachers often became discouraged with their pulpit efforts, but with practice most itinerants improved. All circuit-riders strove to be in the "Spirit of preaching" on every occasion.<sup>54</sup> Methodists often analyzed the quality

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51. Boehm, Reminiscences, pp. 129-30.

52. Dawson A. Phelps, editor, "The Diary of a Chaplain in Andrew Jackson's Army," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, 12 (September, 1953), p. 268.

53. Asbury, Journal, 1 (September 28, 1772), p. 44.

54. See William Henry Milburn's first account of preaching, Ten Years, p. 56. Circuit-riders preached over five times each week and received abundant opportunity to improve their sermons. Lakin, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 227.

of a sermon and recorded the results in a journal or diary. The following list describes sermons from Methodist itinerants who preached in this era: On one occasion Richard Whatcoat's "Word was with power;" William Duke (1757-1840) stated after a sermon in 1774, "a solemn sense of my subject filled my heart;" James Gilruth "preached with great liberty . . . with clearness and some power;" Seth Crowell once wrote, "Oh! my words were without life or energy;" William Watters was "much shut up" ; and Francis Asbury was "much contracted in <sup>55</sup> [his] ideas while preaching."

The Church encouraged a number of basic essentials for itinerant preachers. Methodist ministers were to be motivated to proclaim the gospel for the salvation of mankind. All itinerants prepared for a discourse through frequent practice, prayer and Bible study. Circuit-riders preached an Arminian brand of Christianity. But, each circuit-rider differed in certain respects. The manner of delivery varied from minister to minister; the style of preaching also changed from itinerant to itinerant; and the speaking ability of circuit-riders differed.

The congregation's response to a Methodist circuit-rider's message differed in certain important respects. Many audiences were outwardly attentive during a meeting, but afterward,

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55. Whatcoat, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 106; Quoted in Rogers, "Early Methodist Preachers," p. 197; Gilruth, "Journal," in Sweet, Ibid., p. 375; Crowell, "Journal," p. 37; Watters, Ministerial Labours, p. 62; Asbury, Journal, 1 (July 3, 1775), p. 159.

they failed to respond to the command of repentance. Though polite, they remained spiritually inattentive to the Methodist itinerant. Occasionally, the Methodist minister confronted a rude congregation, or a group of recalcitrant individuals among an otherwise well-behaved audience. These citizens were spiritually inattentive and manifested their inattention through disruptive action. The traveling minister also encountered a number of audiences who reacted favorably to the message of salvation.

The Methodist minister preached to obtain results measurable in conversions. When the preacher received little more than polite attention from his auditors, his senses became alarmed at the spiritual deadness of the congregation. Awakened Methodists usually reacted to the sermon and when a discourse did not visibly affect a group, the traveling minister believed that he had encountered an irreligious people. If the circuit-rider's message was dull he attributed the lack of response to his own failures.<sup>56</sup> But, when his sermon was "powerful" and the people were insensitive, the Methodist preacher faulted the audience. Jesse Lee stated, "how hard it is for me . . . , when I see no visible stir among the hearers."<sup>57</sup> After he preached to an especially inattentive group, Richard Whatcoat prayed, "Lord Raise the Ded."<sup>58</sup>

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56. Dailey, Thomas Smith, p. 24; Crowell, "Journal," p. 53.

57. Thrift, Jesse Lee, p. 82.

58. Whatcoat, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 99.

Every Methodist itinerant was greatly concerned when there were no visible conversions among the congregation. Francis Asbury, who attended Methodist meetings in America for over forty years, explained the causes of the lack of audience reaction. "People may hear the word . . . , and resist . . . his Spirit," he wrote, "till they and their seats have an equal degree of spiritual sensibility."<sup>59</sup> In another explanation, Asbury stated;

How irrational it is, that rational beings should employ their thoughts with readiness on every trifling subject, when they can hardly be brought to think seriously on the things of eternity, although the Holy Spirit awakens their sensibility, and alarms their fears! O, the strange perverseness, the deadly depravity of man!<sup>60</sup>

The Methodist minister preached to these groups and hoped that his sermon would "profit the people" at a future day.<sup>61</sup>

Some citizens reacted adversely to Methodist doctrine. Every minister occasionally encountered a congregation of "Gospel slightsers." A group of this description often interrupted the preacher while he discoursed and threatened to disrupt the meeting. Other times, the audience became disorderly and treated the circuit-rider with "the greatest indifference and disrespect."<sup>62</sup> Some Americans even came to Methodist gatherings intoxicated in order to mock religion.

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59. Asbury, Journal, 1 (December 1, 1776), p. 206.

60. Ibid., (June 26, 1775), pp. 158-59.

61. Lakin, "Journal," in Sweet, Ibid., p. 213.

62. Asbury, Journal, 1 (July 9, 1780), p. 365; Finley, Autobiography, p. 196; Crowell, "Journal," p. 47.



Many itinerants rebuked the instigators of disorder and brought additional reproach on themselves; but, in a number of instances, a reproof restored the church to order.<sup>63</sup>

In rare instances the disorderly faction at a Methodist gathering attacked the circuit-rider. Thomas Ward was once threatened by a group of violent men in Duck Creek, Delaware. One man dragged Ware out of the church, but a Methodist member, described as a "giant of a man," seized the attacker and secured Ware's release. Many other ministers at one time or another faced similar circumstances.<sup>64</sup> The following confrontation occurred at an Ohio camp meeting where James B. Finley preached:

A row was raised . . . by about twenty lewd fellows of the baser sort, who came upon the ground intoxicated, and had vowed they would break up the meeting. . . . The members saw that they must either defend themselves or allow the ruffians to beat them and insult their wives and daughters. . . . Brother Birkhammer, an exceeding stout man, seized their bully leader, . . . and with one great thrust of his brawny arm crushed him down between two benches. The aiddecamp of the bully ran to his relief, but it was to meet the same fate. . . . Here they were held in durance vile till the sheriff and his posse came and took possession, and binding them, with ten others, they were carried before a justice, who fined them heavily for the misdemeanor.<sup>65</sup>

But, Methodist preachers believed that persecution was a good indication of religious success and advance. "Inroads

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63. Lakin, "Journal," in Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 206; Peck, Early Methodism, p. 45; Milburn, Ten Years, pp. 53, 72-73; Saddle-Bags, pp. 73-75.

64. Ware, Memoir, pp. 81-82; Cartwright, Autobiography, pp. 70-71; Dailey, Thomas Smith, p. 68.

65. Finley, Autobiography, p. 252.

made on the territory of darkness will always excite a sturdy  
 conflict," one minister explained.<sup>66</sup>

Perhaps, a majority of the congregations a Methodist  
 circuit-rider encountered were attentive. On some occasions,  
 a "solemn awe" rested on a meeting after the conclusion of  
 the sermon.<sup>67</sup> At other times, preachers described their  
 audience as "deeply affected," or in similar terms.<sup>68</sup> The  
 minister, after his message, prayed with "mourners," citizens  
 who were under intense conviction for their sins, and "seekers,"  
 who desired the immediate salvation of their souls.<sup>69</sup> When a  
 revival ensued, the traveling preacher witnessed many con-  
 versions. A general religious awakending often began when  
 a "seeker" was converted and exhorted others. A typical  
 Methodist's salvation experience occurred in Ontario District,  
 New York in 1825;

A young woman, like many of her age, had indulged in the  
 vanities of a giddy world to the almost entire neglect  
 of her . . . soul; but now she was arrested in her mad  
 course by the strong arm of conviction. The great deep  
 of her heart was broken up; she saw clearly that she  
 was a child of wrath, and in danger of hell. With this  
 view of her sad condition, she fell prostrate at the feet  
 of her offended sovereign, and . . . cried for mercy  
 . . . . She obtained a most satisfactory evidence of her  
 acceptance with God through the merits of Jesus Christ.<sup>70</sup>

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66. Ibid., p. 203.

67. Crowell, "Journal," p. 49.

68. Lloyd, "Rhetorical Analysis," pp. 242-45.

69. Firth, Benjamin Abbot, p. 149; Bangs, Freeborn  
 Garrettson, p. 78.

70. "Revival of Religion on Ontario District," The  
 Methodist Magazine, 8 (April, 1825), pp. 158-61.

A circuit-rider observed the life of a new convert. The Church trained its ministers to discern between mere outward emotion and inward religious change. When converts displayed a "settled peace" and were meek, serious and patient in conduct, the Church received them as members. The traveling preacher accepted new believers into the denomination and instructed them concerning the essentials of the faith.<sup>71</sup>

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71. Asbury, Journal, 1 (June 22, 1773), p. 82.

## CONCLUSION

Several conclusions have emerged from this study of Methodist traveling preachers in America. First, the Methodist Episcopal Church became the largest religious denomination in the United States during the era from 1766 to 1844. Circuit-riders were the primary instruments in this great expansion. With the exception of Francis Asbury and Peter Cartwright, the names of these itinerants have been forgotten. Yet, they contributed to the development of a large Church and culture in the United States.

Second, the traveling minister's relationship with Methodist Church structure guided the course of his life and ministry. He submitted to bishops and presiding elders who stationed itinerants on any circuit within a large geographic area. The circuit-rider's home life suffered greatly from this system of pilgrimage and financial neglect. But, the Church promoted ministers who endured the effects of the itinerancy.

Third, the Methodist itinerant learned through constant personal study and practice. The Church did not provide college instruction for its preachers during the major part of this era and the circuit-rider devised his own means of education.

Fourth, constant travel in this time of primitive road conditions, exposure to weather and the emotional drudgery

of many journeys, was the Methodist's most difficult task. He lived in hardship and physical suffering that demanded great patience and endurance. In the pursuit of his duty, the Methodist circuit-rider became a symbol of dedication.

Fifth, because many Americans had not experienced salvation, the Church held meetings where ministers preached an Arminian message of grace and salvation for all. The itinerant was ordained by the Church, pursued an education and traveled circuits in order to fulfill this call to preach Christ. Many Americans experienced conversion through his pulpit activities. The ministry of a traveling preacher came to an apex when a revival swept a local community. When religious awakening spread, the circuit-rider realized his two-fold purpose, to bring new converts into the Kingdom of God and to help older members in their pursuit of holiness.

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