

Virginia United Methodist *HERITAGE*
Bulletin of the Virginia Conference Historical Society
of the United Methodist Church
Lee B. Sheaffer, president

Copyright © 2002 Commission on Archives and History
of the Virginia Conference

PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

David W.C. Bearr
James M. Becker
Robert T. Casey
Stephen S. Mansfield
Catherine D. Morgan
Nancy Newins
David J. Rochford III
Patti B. Russell, *chair*
Bruce C. Souders

HERITAGE is published twice yearly for \$5.00, postpaid, by the Commission on Archives and History of the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church. Some back issues available for \$3.00 each, postpaid.

Address new subscriptions and renewals, address changes, manuscripts, queries, and all other correspondence to: *HERITAGE*, P.O. Box 1719, Glen Allen, VA 23060.

Virginia United Methodist *HERITAGE*

Patti B. Russell, *editor*
Debra A. Duty, *production coordinator*
Sarah M. Buchanan, *production assistant*

Volume XXVIII, Number 2

FALL 2002

Contents

The Old Brunswick Circuit, 1772-1800	1
<i>James M. Becker</i>	
History in the Making	35

HERITAGE is printed on acid-free paper by Colormark, Richmond, Virginia.

from the editor's quill



It's about time. In this issue James M. Becker takes up the long-neglected story of the old Brunswick Circuit, the Southside Virginia birthplace of Methodist revivalism, the training-ground for Methodism's southern and westward movement, and the site of the first Methodist school in America. In future issues of HERITAGE we hope to take the Brunswick story even further. Jim Becker, pastor at Wakefield, Sussex County, is the historian for the Virginia Conference Historical Society.

We had promised for this issue the thrilling story of the Conference Historical Society's 70 years of service, but that one will appear in the next issue, Spring 2003.

Seems there was a printing glitch in the last issue of HERITAGE, Spring 2002. A few subscribers reported a missing "signature," a four-page section. We promptly replaced the defective copies, of course, but if you also missed pages from your copy of that issue, do let us know; we want to make it right.

—Patti B. Russell

The Old Brunswick Circuit, 1772-1800

James M. Becker

Introduction

The Brunswick Circuit is the oldest Methodist circuit under continuous appointment. Since 1773, the first official listing of preaching appointments in America, Brunswick has always appeared among the places to which preachers were sent. That year it was listed as "Petersburg," but it was given the name "Brunswick" in 1774.¹

Methodism in 1773 was largely an urban movement. The other appointments that first year were New York, Philadelphia, New Jersey, Baltimore, and Norfolk. Since most of the appointments were in urban places, it is ironic that the first major evangelistic success came in a rural area such as Brunswick. The pattern of continuous appointment for New Jersey breaks in 1774, when the circuit there was divided into what appears to have been four circuits in New Jersey and Delaware, though some of these may have been organized by the preachers sent to Philadelphia. Norfolk was not listed in 1776, probably because the societies in the Norfolk area were served by the Brunswick preachers. New York and Philadelphia, under British occupation, were not listed in 1778.²

Evangelistic growth along the Old Brunswick Circuit was a model for Methodist movement west. The organization of the Brunswick Circuit was a pattern for the organization of subsequent rural circuits. Since even 200 years later most appointments are made to rural circuits or stations, the Brunswick Circuit continues to have vast influence over the practical form of local church organization.

Station churches were less successful than rural circuits in early Methodism. Even the urban stations usually had several rural preaching places attached. Urban Methodist success dates mostly from a much later period, the years immediately following World War II and the population growth of suburban America.

Study of the Brunswick Circuit, long neglected perhaps because sources are difficult to obtain, thus provides significant data regarding the early growth of Methodism as a whole. Many of the early leaders of Methodism were recruited there or did much of their preaching work in the area.

Planting Seeds in Southside Virginia

The origins of the Brunswick Circuit and Methodism's first real flowering are rooted in the evangelistic work of George Whitefield. Whitefield visited Virginia in 1740 on one of his preaching tours and met the elderly James Blair, who was the commissary of the Bishop of London, as well as the first president of The College of William and Mary. As commissary, Blair was empowered to act as a kind of ecclesiastical viceroy to the Anglican bishop.

Since none of the Colonial bishops visited America, the highest Colonial church official was the commissary. Whitefield considered Blair a supporter of his evangelistic work.³

"A few years later" a bricklayer named Samuel Morris gathered a group of dissenters in Hanover County and began to read Whitefield's sermons aloud. This was called "Morris' Reading House." In the winter of 1742-43 William Robinson began to travel through Charlotte, Prince Edward, Campbell, and Albemarle, preaching and teaching in the evangelical "new style." In July 1743 Robinson reached Hanover, and there effected the conversion of Samuel Davies.⁴

Whitefield visited Virginia again in 1745.⁵ Davies may have been preparing for the ministry by this time and was influenced by Whitefield either on this visit or on one of the earlier visits. Davies founded a Presbyterian parish in Hanover County in 1747. Presbyterians in Virginia were "dissenters," potentially the object of criminal proceedings and jail or fines. "Dissenters" were persons who failed to support the "Established" Church, *i.e.* the Anglican Church in Virginia. "Dissent" included failure to pay the mandatory tax in tobacco for the support of the (Anglican) clergy, preaching without a license, and failure to attend Anglican Church services. Presbyterians were sometimes punished less severely than Baptists, several of whom were imprisoned, fined, or beaten.

Some dissenting preachers were issued licenses, however, including Davies. He was licensed by the General Court of Virginia to officiate at four meetinghouses. These preaching places were as much as 60 miles apart.⁶ Davies' Hanover churches had 300 white communicants by 1751.⁷ A few years later, at the death of Jonathan Edwards in 1758, Davies was called to the presidency of Princeton, Davies being considered the best candidate to extend the Edwards evangelical revival.

Meanwhile Whitefield came to Virginia again in 1763, preaching mostly on the Northern Neck.⁸ Anecdotal evidence suggests that on one of his visits to Virginia, Whitefield saw to the conversion of a young man named Devereux Jarratt. Jarratt was raised in New Kent County, not far from Hanover County. He later claimed he had led an immoral life as a youth, but about this time he decided to seek ordination in the Established Church.⁹ Anglican rules demanded theological study for their candidates for ordination. The only formal American training for the Anglican priesthood was at The College of William and Mary, so Jarratt was probably a student there. Perhaps he completed his theological studies by 1762.¹⁰

At any rate, Jarratt sought ordination in London in late 1762. He passed an oral examination conducted by the Bishop of London's chaplain, and then was interviewed by the bishop.¹¹ Parchment in hand, Jarratt returned across the Atlantic to Virginia, stopping for a few weeks in Petersburg. Informed of a parish opening in Dinwiddie County, he applied and was duly installed as the rector of the Bath Parish, which included two "chapels" and one church in Brunswick County.

Parish lines were roughly the same as county lines, though occasionally a county held more than one parish. The church vestry had both secular and religious functions and was elected through a political process. Clergy received tax money in the form of tobacco, which they were expected to sell for their own support. About this time, some Virginians protested being compelled to support clergy of whom they did not approve. The House of Burgesses passed a law attempting to compensate for the fluctuating price of tobacco, and clergy initiated a lawsuit called "Parsons' Cause" to recover their previous salary. One of the attorneys in this case was the young Patrick Henry.¹²

Whitefield returned to Virginia again in 1765 and spent some time in Petersburg, where he encountered Jarratt.¹³ Documentation is elusive regarding the relationships among Whitefield, Davies, Jarratt, and the others involved in providing a foundation for the great Brunswick revival to follow. Nevertheless, the coincidence of geography and dates makes their association almost conclusive. New Kent, Hanover, Petersburg, and Dinwiddie were quite near to each other. The population of Petersburg and other Virginia towns was so small that it would have been difficult for educated persons to avoid meeting one another.¹⁴

By 1765, if not before he went to London for ordination, Jarratt realized that he had little in common with other Anglican clergy in Virginia. He considered them corrupt and dissolute. He accused them of gambling, drinking to excess, foxhunting, and other vices. Moreover, they often neglected routine parish duties.¹⁵ Jarratt was probably concerned about clergy behavior similar to his own habits prior to conversion. He began to preach outside the boundaries of his own parish. He found a kindred spirit in Archibald McRoberts, who became the rector of a nearby parish in 1775.¹⁶ The spiritual alienation between Virginia priests and people has been widely remarked by scholars, including Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*.¹⁷

Some, though surely not all, Anglican priests were guilty of immorality. However, there is another possible explanation for the conflict between Jarratt and other clergy. Most of the other clergy left Virginia during or after the Revolution. Many were Tories. Most of the rest had their church lands confiscated with disestablishment of the Church of England and also lost their personal estates and potential for income.¹⁸ Jarratt's criticism of moral issues may have reflected a patriot's political views.

By the late 1760s Jarratt was traveling rigorously through many counties south of the James River, preaching the evangelical gospel across parish lines. This preaching was technically "irregular," in violation of church canons. "Irregular" preaching was punishable by secular law, though this law was difficult to enforce against credentialed Anglican clergy. No doubt the distance to ecclesiastical authority in London was another reason for non-enforcement.

Eventually Jarratt established a kind of vast "circuit" over at least 29 counties in Virginia and North Carolina.¹⁹ This included most of the Virginia counties south of the James River. In North Carolina the Jarratt work covered much of the northern tier of counties in Tidewater, down to the Roanoke River and a little south of it. This circuit was quite informal. Probably some of the preaching places in this enormous area were rarely visited.

Documenting the exact terrain in Jarratt's "extended parish" is difficult. It was mostly in Tidewater, that is, downstream and east of the "fall line" marking the limit of navigability for the rivers and streams of Virginia and North Carolina.²⁰ Aware of the illegality of preaching over such a wide area, Jarratt perhaps deliberately failed to provide contemporary certification of the geography concerned. The boundaries of this informal "parish" were probably similar to the first boundaries of the Brunswick Circuit that was established by Methodist preachers a few years later.

Southside Virginia

Some background on Southside Virginia may be helpful. Much of this land was settled late, despite being close to earlier settlements. Jamestown was only just across the James River on the northern shore. Indeed, the site of the 16th-century Roanoke Colony was only a short distance east along the sounds that traverse the eastern shore of North Carolina. Southside was settled late for the simple reason that much of it was the first "reservation" for American Indians. A line of rivers and creeks bisected Southside into two roughly equal parts,²¹ and Indians²² were expected to remain south of that line or west of the Appalachian boundary line established by Parliament with the 1763 treaty ending the French and Indian War. Much of this line in Southside was along the Blackwater River which in the middle of the 18th century became a formal boundary separating early counties such as Isle of Wight, Surry, and Prince George from newly organized Southampton and Sussex Counties.²³

Dispossessed of most of the lands south of the Blackwater River and farther west the Appomattox River, some Indian tribes emigrated much farther west. For example, the Sioux moved to the Great Plains in the 18th century, adopted a horse culture, and in the 19th century engaged in conflict with other tribes leading to a great conflict caused by yet other white encroachments.²⁴

By the 1750s white Southside development began to escalate. Many of the white land grants and illegal squatter claims in Dinwiddie County, for example, date from the 1750s, not long before Jarratt came to Bath Parish.²⁵ The first Prince Edward County roads were built as late as the 1730s and 1740s, and taverns were being licensed in the 1750s.²⁶ Thus much of Southside was close to the frontier even as late as the 1760s, not much before the Revolution. New land grants were still being made in Isle of Wight

County and Smithfield, much farther east and right along the southern shore of the James River.²⁷

The College of William and Mary had a direct role in Southside affairs. The 1693 royal charter made a gift of 20,000 acres to provide a kind of endowment income for the College. Half of this land was in Surry and Sussex Counties. Sussex County was split off from Surry County only in 1754, county division being the usual solution to landowner complaints about the distance to court sessions. Of the 10,000 acres of "College lands" south of the James, about 8,000 were south of the Blackwater River among lands generally conceded to Indians.

The College lands never provided substantial commercial income, and eventually the College sold the lands to wealthy planters. For about a century, though, the College planted tobacco or leased the land to planters. In order to work the lands, the College bought slaves, including not only field hands to crop tobacco but house slaves who provided labor and personal service in Williamsburg for students and professors.²⁸

Tobacco was the main agricultural product produced in 18th-century Virginia. Methods of tobacco production then in use destroyed the land. Generally a planter could expect only three years of tobacco out of a parcel of land. So a planter would establish a base and build a house, generally more modest than the Tara envisioned by Hollywood. A typical plantation house might have no more than two rooms connected by a breezeway.

Immediately the planter began to clear the land. Everything was uprooted. Not only trees but even stumps were burned out.²⁹ This was in contrast to Indian agriculture. Tobacco was not new to Tidewater and Southside. Indians had long cultivated this land. By settler standards, however, Indian agriculture seemed haphazard and lacking in system. Indian fields were scattered over a wide area, much of that area being uncultivated in any given year. Stumps weren't removed because there was plenty of cropland available. White colonists perceived Indian production methods as inefficient, reflecting lazy work habits. Indians felt that white agriculture wasted land and ravaged its beauty.³⁰

White planters cleared the land and planted a crop, taking every available parcel of space. Fields needed to be near navigable rivers because there were no real roads. In fact, the rivers were effectively the roads. Tobacco once prepared would be rolled down the river to a private dock,³¹ or up to Petersburg or Smithfield to a public dock. Then it would be shipped to England, for even if the crop were intended for foreign sale the British government demanded a substantial tax. The tax made Colonial crops competitive with much less cost-effective foreign production even though Colonial crops were inexpensive to produce and shipping costs quite reasonable.³²

Tobacco demands a lot of nutrients. At the end of three years, since fertilizer and technology were not available, the land was exhausted and the

planter moved his fields. Initially he had purchased a much larger acreage than he could plant in one cycle of three years, since he knew he would soon have to move his operation. Gradually through the course of the 17th century and all through the 18th century the planters moved west.³³

Modern techniques have resolved the production dilemmas of tobacco farmers in large measure. In the 18th century plowing was not widespread and farm tools were rudimentary or non-existent. Fertilizer was primitive and not often used. Today Southside farmers ride air-conditioned "tractors" inside which crop dust and smells rarely penetrate. Though farmers must contend with the same vagaries of weather and market forces confronted by early planters, agriculture today demands science and intelligence.

Early planters found a different solution to the cost economics of their work. Cheap labor was available. After a brief period of unsuccessful experiments with indentured servants and Indians working crops, 17th-century planters built labor forces consisting of slaves.³⁴

It is not a main purpose of this paper to recount in detail the horrors of American slavery. Though planters and even theologians found a biblical model for the slave system, American slavery was incalculably less humane than biblical slavery. A few distinctions will be cited. Biblical slavery was not necessarily inherited, that is, a slave child might not be bound for life. Biblical slavery was not based on race. Moreover, a biblical slave had rights, including the right to life. Finally, slaves were introduced to American plantations through several devastating procedures, the awesome "Middle Passage" wherein a slave had only 18 inches of airspace; the "barracoons," or slave pen concentration camps; and the usual West Indies tour to "break the slaves" under terrible climate conditions and subject to rampant and devastating diseases such as malaria and yellow fever.

The short-term benefits of slavery for the well-being of the planter class, however, cannot be denied. While historians still debate the economic aspects of slavery, the slave system provided a large labor force for planters who needed that large labor force. Tobacco planters needed that large labor force, but not year-round. Rather than permit idleness among their workers, planters employed their slaves at other tasks, trained them in various skills, and often rented them out when they weren't needed for farm work.

Southside Virginia by the 1760s was thus a very rural farming region. Virginia as a whole was a rural Colony, despite being one of the most populous of the American Colonies. By the Revolution, Virginia had a population of 700,000, including two of the 20 largest cities in America, Norfolk and Petersburg. The population of Petersburg, however, was only about 2,800.³⁵

Long before the Revolution Petersburg was already the commercial hub of Virginia.³⁶ Many Indians were required to trade at Petersburg until well into the 18th century.³⁷ Since tobacco could be shipped from points far up the James River, Petersburg developed a large hinterland of plantations and

farms. Tobacco was brought from private or public docks and stored in warehouses near the James River. In Petersburg a number of these warehouses were located in a "suburb" of the city located on an island called Pocahontas, just north of the city. Eventually, Pocahontas was incorporated in the City of Petersburg, which was separated from its parent Dinwiddie County according to the Virginia custom of not including cities and counties in the same court and political jurisdictions.³⁸

By the middle of the 18th century Virginia county political divisions were becoming more fixed. Gradually settlement inched across the land, partly due to agricultural aspirations of newcomers as well as the constant hunger for new land to replace the cropland that had been devastated by outmoded methods.

When settlers were removed from the jurisdiction of the old courthouse, either the courthouse was relocated to be nearer the new center of population or the county was divided to accommodate commercial needs. Thus Isle of Wight County was divided and Southampton County was created. Surry was divided and Sussex was born. So the political organization of Tidewater and Southside moved south and west. Probably this constant process of division generated local political and economic ferment, which abetted existing Colonial grievances. Sometimes a planter missed a court hearing due to weather or distance or impassability of the river, and this might be responsible for economic or social hardship.³⁹

Indians had used Petersburg to ship furs and tobacco and other goods long before the days of substantial white settlement. One of the key British forts, Fort Henry, was placed in Petersburg, intended to protect white settlers as they moved west and devoured Indian lands.⁴⁰ Taxation to support British troops in such locations was among the colonial grievances. Thus after white settlement it was natural to enhance Petersburg's role as a commercial center.

The First Revivals

By the late 1760s the pattern of Established Church control was already under attack. Only partly was this the work of internal dissidents such as Jarratt and McRoberts. Dissent was rampant. Baptists were among the most noted examples of preachers who suffered for faith. No doubt this explains the vigor with which many modern Southern Baptists today advocate separation of church and state. Some Baptists had been Anglican, but began to call themselves "Separate Baptists."⁴¹

Methodists had an advantage over those who were labeled "dissenters." Technically their societies were under the ecclesiastical rule of the Anglican diocese. The official Methodist connection with the Established Church may have been in part a subterfuge to circumvent laws against dissent. By the 1760s Wesley and his preachers were almost invariably excluded from Anglican parishes in England. Illustrative is the oft-told story of Wesley preaching on his father's grave when prevented from using the nearby

church. It was the only part of church property, he is reputed to have said, from which he could not be excluded. As Methodists began to organize in Virginia, long before Wesley's decision to ordain in 1784, Wesley's functional Anglicanism was in doubt even though he continued to take frequent communion at the hands of priests he attacked.

When Methodists appeared in this period the status of Methodist lay preachers and Methodist communicants of Anglican parishes was fortunately ambiguous. They were less secure than the Anglican clergy but relatively free in comparison to Baptists and Quakers. While Methodists shared many of the beliefs of dissenters, official Anglican affiliation exempted them from the penalties of jail or fines.

Thus there is no surprise that Methodism came to Virginia around 1770. It is less certain why it came so late. Already Irish Methodist preachers were in America. Robert Strawbridge was active in western Maryland and northern Virginia, for example. Strawbridge, a veteran Methodist who had preached in Ireland, made his living by farming, not preaching, although his frequent absences probably meant that his wife did the farming. In 1766 the first Methodist property was bought in Leesburg, Virginia, probably as a result of Strawbridge's work.⁴² As a farmer, though, he lacked the time and perhaps the skills to organize the persons who heard him. Organization would be developed in Southside Virginia on what came to be known as the Brunswick Circuit.

The Brunswick Revival represented a number of forces that came together in a particular time and place. Methodists were present in this region south of the James River by the mid-1760s, even though there was not yet any official Methodist preaching. When the preachers began coming, it was easy to organize societies and circuits because the lay personnel were already present, converted by Jarratt, Whitefield, Davies, or McRoberts perhaps, or converted in Ireland or in Devon coal mines before they emigrated to the Colonies.

In many ways the ground had already been prepared. Jarratt's work in particular created the framework of a Methodist circuit. It was an extremely large geographical area, hundreds of miles around. Jarratt preached at about 270 locations, including some perhaps as far west as Prince Edward County, as far east as Camden County, North Carolina, or even Suffolk, Virginia, and as far south as the modern Roanoke Rapids, if not Raleigh, North Carolina.⁴³ Many of these preaching sites probably did not experience regular pastoral visits. It is not known if Jarratt included preaching places north of the James River. Perhaps he left that to the evangelical Presbyterian work, of which he surely approved.

In fact, evangelical Presbyterians and Methodists and some Anglicans were close theologically as well as in technique and organization. All relied on the enthusiastic preaching style modeled by Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. Typically Anglican preaching was dry, academic, and,

in a word, "dull." Some contemporaries called it "cold."⁴⁴ Though Wesley's preaching had sometimes fallen into the rigid academic mode, Methodist preachers in America were much more lively.

Jarratt complained that Anglican sermons were "moral harangues" delivered in "a cool, dispassionate manner," urging parishioners to "walk in the primrose paths of...virtue, and not to travel the foul track of disgraceful vice," while evangelicals described the "guilt of sin...the entire depravity of human nature, the awful danger mankind are [sic] in...the tremendous curse to which they are obnoxious, and their utter inability to evade the sentence of the law and the stroke of divine justice by their own power, merit, or good works."⁴⁵

Jarratt and his sympathizer McRoberts, in contrast, emphasized doctrines which the dissenting ministers were preaching with such telling effect...doctrines of the Church of England which their fellow ministers were neglecting and had been neglecting so long that they seemed new when the Presbyterian and Baptist evangelists expounded them.

These doctrines included salvation by grace and final perseverance.⁴⁶ One contemporary Presbyterian writer spoke of the "cold and lukewarm indifference to the ministrations of the Gospel in all that region." A Baptist historian referred to "a general dearth of religion that existed almost throughout the state."⁴⁷

Methodist preaching was partly a class appeal popular among yeoman farmers who wished for social mobility. Such persons were often responsive to an evangelical style. The planter class was less likely to be sympathetic to evangelical preaching, though there were notable exceptions. Wesley's theme of unmerited divine grace was probably given less attention than it had received in England. Sin and repentance were the main emphases. These were not unique. Baptists, for example, differed on doctrinal matters, particularly the process of initiation, but their Calvinist theology was not greatly different from that of other dissenters and even Whitefield.

By 1770 Jarratt realized there was too much work for one preacher. He sought help from Wesley and the Methodists. Wesley had begun to send preaching missionaries to America in 1769, though they had not yet been organized in conferences and circuits. Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor came to New Jersey in 1769. Initially they concentrated their work in New York City and Philadelphia. New York had been a preaching place since 1766, established by an Irish preacher named Philip Embury. Another early preacher in New York was Thomas Webb, a British army officer who had suffered grievous wounds in the Siege of Louisburg Fortress and been given a "tombstone" promotion from lieutenant to captain, and assigned a sinecure position at the frontier barracks of Albany, New York. Albany was an outpost in the struggle against Indian nations. Webb went to England and personally appealed for Wesley to send preachers to America.⁴⁸

Through this confluence of forces, preachers began to come south to Petersburg and the economic heartland of Virginia in Southside. Robert Williams, another Irish Methodist, had ridden circuits in Ireland for several years. Emigrating about 1769, he resumed preaching in 1770. For a time he rode the informal circuit established by Strawbridge in western Maryland and northern Virginia, including Georgetown, Alexandria, and Leesburg.⁴⁹

During revivals conducted by Strawbridge and Williams about this time, William Watters was converted. Watters was the first American-born Methodist itinerant and became an important early preacher. Another preacher who worked with Strawbridge in this period was John King, who later was appointed to some of the early circuits carved out of the Brunswick Circuit. King was another recent immigrant who was licensed.⁵⁰ King often preached in a shrill, irritating voice, and was enjoined by Wesley to "scream no more, at the peril of your soul."⁵¹

Williams in 1771 spent some time preaching on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. W.W. Bennett later described this as a "successful missionary tour."⁵² In 1772 Williams traveled to Philadelphia and was licensed by Richard Boardman.⁵³ Boardman, who headed the official Wesleyan mission, was uncomfortable with Williams but tolerated him because he secured converts. Williams was undisciplined in his preaching and travel habits, and defied Boardman by publishing books without authorization.⁵⁴ A license from Boardman would have been irrelevant to Virginia clergy or lay vestry, integrated as Colonial government still was with religious authority. Thus Williams must have also secured local licensing in Virginia.

Williams began his Virginia mission in dramatic fashion. He was the first Methodist preacher in Norfolk. He landed on the waterfront and walked a few steps to the courthouse, where he knelt in prayer and began to sing. A crowd gathered, partly derisive in the pattern familiar among English Methodists. There he preached to a "most disorderly crowd." Williams also visited Portsmouth the same day he arrived in Norfolk.⁵⁵ Later in the year or early in 1773 he was joined by William Watters.

Williams' visits to Norfolk and Portsmouth did not establish "churches." Methodists had no churches anywhere prior to the Christmas Conference in 1784. The very word "church" was legally reserved to Anglican parish churches. A dissenting congregation had a "chapel," as did a congregation of faithful Anglican parishioners who attended a secondary church in a parish. Devout Methodists were expected to maintain full membership and participate in regular sacramental life in their respective geographical Anglican parishes.

Invited to the Petersburg area by Pocahontas merchants receptive to all evangelical sects, Williams began to preach regularly in Petersburg and Pocahontas later in 1772 and met Devereux Jarratt, who, with similar concerns, welcomed him warmly. Jarratt invited Williams to use the numerous pulpits which he was able to visit only occasionally.⁵⁶ This

included the "chapels of ease"⁵⁷ belonging to Jarratt's Bath Parish in Dinwiddie County.

Events began to spiral. Soon the growing evangelical work was too extensive to be administered by distant Methodist authorities either in England or in Philadelphia and New York. Joseph Pilmoor was sent to Norfolk to make a survey of the opportunity for growth in the new area. His travels took him to Norfolk, Portsmouth, and southwest to Suffolk, thence south along the North Carolina coastal counties.⁵⁸

American Methodism began to have regular conference sessions in 1773. The minutes of these first conferences were published in a kind of pamphlet form, and finally privately bound together in collected volumes. Norfolk was first listed as a formal appointment in the official minutes for 1773. That initial year Williams was appointed to Petersburg. The town of Petersburg, though, did not appear regularly in these minutes for some years. In fact, the Petersburg appointment was really the Brunswick Circuit appointment that appears in every subsequent list of appointments for more than two centuries. It included several county preaching places that had been part of Jarratt's circuit. Later in 1773 Pilmoor visited Norfolk, Portsmouth, and "other places in the Eastern part of the state."⁵⁹

Though it is established that Methodism by the 1770s already had friends over a large part of Southside, William Watters wrote later that in this period "we found very few in the course of 300 miles who knew experimentally, anything of the Lord Jesus Christ, or the power of his grace." Eastern Virginia was a "spiritual wilderness."⁶⁰

The Brunswick Circuit under that name first appears in the listed appointments for 1774.⁶¹ No Brunswick preaching places were named in sources until Francis Asbury came to the area in 1775. Nevertheless, probably even in rudimentary form the Brunswick Circuit included many or all of the counties influenced by Jarratt's preaching. Thus the Brunswick preaching appointments quickly became several circuits.

Many persons were converted to faith under the first appointed Methodist preachers. Most years, numerical growth was so enormous that more preachers were needed and circuits were routinely divided into their respective constituent parts. The first minutes from 1773 report 100 members in "Virginia."⁶² One of the converts the first year was Jesse Lee, later a prominent preacher.⁶³ Virginia statistics included northerly Leesburg as well as Norfolk, Petersburg, and Brunswick; moreover, the round number 100 indicates an estimate rather than an actual count, as do the figures for New York, Philadelphia, New Jersey, and Maryland. A total membership for Methodism in America was recorded as 1,100.⁶⁴

In fact, these early returns were underestimates of Methodism's true strength. This field had been plowed frequently already. Thus it is no surprise that in 1774 the minutes report 73 members on the Norfolk appointment and 210 on the Brunswick Circuit. In a pattern repeated

regularly in later years, expansion led to additional preachers' being assigned to this rapidly growing area. Consequently, while only one preacher was sent to Norfolk, three preachers went to Brunswick. The tripling of the membership in southern Virginia, moreover, is good evidence that by 1774 there were already a number of regular preaching appointments in the Brunswick area. It seems likely that some of these preaching places had been among Jarratt's 270 distinct chapels and meetinghouses.

The result of "mission saturation" by three of the 20 American Methodist preachers was substantial growth. The "revival" was well under way. Brunswick that year grew to a membership of 800, while Norfolk with a single preacher added only enough to reach a membership of 125.⁶⁵

Significantly, when Asbury went to the Brunswick area in 1775 he named a good many preaching places. Some of these were certainly receiving Methodist preaching prior to the formal initiation of circuit preaching in what became the Brunswick area. Many of them were hearing Methodist preachers somewhat before they were officially connected to the Brunswick appointment.

Francis Asbury was appointed to Norfolk in 1775, but later in the year he "changed," that is, traded appointments with one of the Brunswick Circuit preachers. The number of preachers in the Brunswick area grew from three to five. Norfolk reported only 125 members for both 1775 and 1776. But Brunswick Circuit expanded from 800 members to 1,611, no doubt in response to receiving a heavy investment of personnel, in that five of the 20 American preachers were sent there.⁶⁶

The three Brunswick preachers in 1774, five preachers in 1775, and three in 1776 included several who became legendary: Edward Dromgoole, Francis Poythress, William Watters, Freeborn Garrettson, George Shadford, and William Glendenning. Among the other preachers in adjacent circuits organized from Brunswick were Philip Gatch, Reuben Ellis, and John King. It's difficult to determine if their legends were created because of their successful work in Southside, or whether they were sent to Southside because they were already considered the most effective evangelists in America.⁶⁷ Perhaps it is important that several of these preachers were deeply involved in the sacramental conflict that arose at Fluvanna in 1779, and some of them were still active or served as local preachers during the O'Kelly schism of 1792. By any standard, it was a remarkable group of highly motivated and deeply committed men.

Because the Brunswick work was receiving so many new converts and redeemed sinners, Brunswick was divided into four circuits in 1776, including Hanover, Pittsylvania, and "North Carolina." By this time Methodist preachers were saturating roughly the same vast area that had been sketchily served by Jarratt when he was meeting so many far-flung preaching engagements. It should be recalled that Jarratt's evangelical work had begun only six years previously. The "North Carolina" appointment already

extended to the Roanoke River or beyond, including at least half a dozen modern North Carolina counties.

Appointing a preacher as far west as Pittsylvania County indicates that the counties between Petersburg and Pittsylvania were also being served by 1776.⁶⁸ This would include Prince Edward County, long a comfortable place for Presbyterian dissenters, Lunenburg County, Amelia County, and Mecklenburg County. Amelia Circuit appears among the listed appointments by 1777; Sussex Circuit was also listed in 1777. Hanover Circuit appears in 1776, indicating that the preachers began to cross the James River regularly in 1775. This is confirmed by the places north of the river listed in Asbury's journal as having been visited in 1775.⁶⁹

Membership growth kept this lively pace through 1775 into 1776. Brunswick in 1776 reported 1,611 members; Hanover, 270; far west Pittsylvania, 100. North Carolina had 683 members. This was nearly 60 percent of the official American membership of 4,921.⁷⁰

At this point political events intervened in the Methodist story. For the next several years Virginia was at the heart of revolution and war. Nevertheless, in some communities membership continued to expand. In 1777 Brunswick recorded 1,300 members; Sussex, 727; Pittsylvania, 150; Amelia, 690; and North Carolina, 930.⁷¹ Wartime growth was difficult because some of the Methodist preachers and many laymen were conscripted by the patriot militia and spent much of the next few years serving in the army.⁷² North Carolina Circuit was divided into New Hope and Tar River circuits by 1779. Several of these circuits were organized along the river basin backbones suggested by their names in the lists of appointments, for example, New Hope, Tar River, and Roanoke.⁷³

This phenomenal growth can be explained by several circumstances. The decline of the Established Church was a partial explanation. Elsewhere this author has suggested that the broad stereotyping of Anglicans as "atheists," deists, and libertines may be exaggerated. For example, one of the early Virginia bishops, James Madison, was a deist, as were other figures in the reconstituted Episcopal Church.⁷⁴ It has already been noted that many Anglican clergy were gamblers, drinkers, and foxhunters, as were many persons from the English social elite classes. Ironically, Bennett includes an extended quotation from the Rives biography of the political James Madison criticizing the moral climate of Virginia in this period.⁷⁵ The moral decline among Anglican clergy and parishioners, it was hinted, left a vacuum easily supplied by Methodist preaching.

It has also been argued that Southside Virginia was thoroughly prepared for revival by the work of Whitefield, Jarratt, and Williams. This was a populace ready for evangelical preaching, and the Methodist evangelicals were the first to systematically plow the field.

The aggressive appointment of multiple preachers to circuits already showing growth was another factor helping to explain the incredible increase

in membership. Yet one suspects that Methodist theology may have been particularly suited to times of crisis. One regrets that the content of the earliest lay preaching is no longer easily accessible. It was probably a blending of the Arminian theology of John Wesley, filtered by transatlantic immigration, and the Calvinism of Whitefield. It should be remembered that Whitefield had a major role in initiating the early Brunswick revival, and perhaps his influence helps explain the ambivalence of Methodist lay theology regarding the Arminian grace-preaching enforced by the studies of the preachers.

Asbury's Circuit in 1775

Francis Asbury was assigned to the Norfolk appointment in 1775, but in the middle of the conference year he was "changed" to travel through the Brunswick area. He reached Norfolk on May 29,⁷⁶ and preached for a number of weeks in Norfolk and Portsmouth and along the road to Suffolk. He visited the Dismal Swamp, located in the "farthermost part of Portsmouth" parish, and then preached in St. Bride's parish, a regular Anglican appointment near the North Carolina border. He returned from St. Bride's two days later, which probably indicates that he traveled by water for some or all of this journey.⁷⁷

During this part of Asbury's conference year he does not always indicate where he preached or distances between his preaching appointments. This may indicate a tentative quality to the preaching "plan" of the circuit. It may even mean there was no plan, just a list of preaching places which Asbury visited upon invitation or by his own unilateral inclination. During these weeks, for example, he recorded preaching at Norfolk on May 29, June 4, on one or more occasions in the period from May 6 to May 14, June 30, and September 8.⁷⁸ Certainly he preached at Norfolk other times not recorded, but the lack of a weekly or other regular pattern in these preaching appointments is striking.

Asbury records preaching in Portsmouth more frequently, but with no discernible pattern there either. The lack of a pattern or perhaps even a "plan" in the sense familiar in the work of subsequent frontier circuit riders is remarkable. It may be that Asbury had not yet learned the value of regularity and organization in circuit work.

Physically, the Norfolk circuit was less demanding than Brunswick. Asbury traveled it faithfully. He met congregations at the home of "brother Williams," that is, Robert Williams, who lived along the road from Portsmouth to Suffolk. Williams was one of the preachers assigned to the Brunswick Circuit, but he was in the last few weeks of his life and apparently semi-retired by this time.⁷⁹

Asbury preached at Craney Island in the Hampton Roads near Portsmouth, later the site of a naval base and the location of the battle between the Monitor and the Merrimac in the 1860s.⁸⁰ He preached several times at "New Mill

Creek" and "Mill Creek," along the Western Branch south of Portsmouth and thus in the modern City of Chesapeake.⁸¹ From June 4 to June 6 he preached at "different places in the country," and again on June 14 he "returned to town after a short tour" of the rural areas near Portsmouth.⁸²

Asbury in 1775 was not yet the leader of American Methodists. He had been one of Wesley's official eight missionaries commissioned and "sent" in 1771, but others had more authority, particularly Thomas Rankin. Asbury was only 30 years old. He was an "assistant," a vague term roughly equivalent to the "elder," "presiding elder" or "superintendent" of later times, but the meaning of this responsibility was not clearly defined, and in fact the 1774 *Minutes* list nine "assistants" out of the 19 preachers named. Among these assistants cited for 1774 is Daniel Ruff, only just "admitted on trial" that year, what would now be called admitted to probationary status. Three other assistants that year were William Watters, Philip Gatch, and Abraham Whitworth, who were "admitted" that year, probably indicating they had passed their first year "on trial."⁸³ The men designated in the *Minutes* as assistants were a fluctuating group, sometimes as few as nine, other times as many as 14.

Asbury had preached on a British circuit for a few years before emigration. He had been in America only four years. He was surrounded by older men who were more experienced administrators and preachers. His published journal for this period gives no indication that he had particular authority. Only when the other seven official Wesleyan missionaries returned to England due to patriot challenge of their Tory political sentiments did Asbury assume unquestioned leadership.

The appointments listed in the 1775 *Minutes* set Asbury for Norfolk and five preachers for Brunswick. The Brunswick Circuit preachers were George Shadford, Robert Lindsay, Edward Dromgoole, Robert Williams, and William Glendenning. Williams was already prominent in Methodism for his great success in converting hundreds of persons on the Brunswick Circuit. Norfolk reported 125 members in 1775 and Brunswick, 800, as has been already noted.⁸⁴

By late October Asbury had been preaching in the Norfolk-Portsmouth area for nearly five months. At the Philadelphia Conference from which Asbury had been sent to Norfolk it had probably been agreed that Asbury and one of the Brunswick preachers would change places. Asbury on August 16 had received a letter from George Shadford, describing the exciting conversion of 200 souls in a two-month period.⁸⁵ Though Shadford himself was about to return to England,⁸⁶ he was considered the most successful evangelist in Methodism, having converted thousands of people, including several hundred during his service in Brunswick. Near Petersburg, enthusiasm was so great in one community that all-night religious meetings were conducted.⁸⁷

Meanwhile, Robert Williams had died on September 26.⁸⁸ Williams had been assigned to Brunswick in Philadelphia at the same conference which

sent Asbury to Norfolk, and even though Williams was semi-retired, Asbury may have considered himself a replacement for him. Another factor was the occupation of Norfolk by British Marines, who arrived on October 3. In 1777 no preacher was sent to Norfolk because of the British occupation.⁸⁹ Although not clear from Methodist sources, the 1775 British landing caused a smallpox epidemic in the Portsmouth area,⁹⁰ and perhaps Asbury wished to avoid contagion as well. On October 23, Asbury recorded in his journal that he was about to go to Brunswick. His journey west to the Brunswick area began on October 30.⁹¹

On the road to Brunswick, Asbury passed through Southampton Court House, a patriot stronghold, where he was "examined" by a representative of "the committee to examine strangers." Asbury and those with him "gave an account of themselves" and were treated with kindness, including dinner.⁹² This was surely an examination on his political views regarding the patriot cause.⁹³ Asbury "entered" Brunswick circuit on November 2.⁹⁴

Meanwhile, the Tory missionaries were considering a return to England. No doubt they had experienced patriot criticism or even violence. On August 7 Asbury received a letter from Thomas Rankin explaining that he, Martin Rodda, and James Dempster had consulted together and concluded it would be best to return to England.⁹⁵ Although Wesley's opposition to the patriot cause was not yet known in the Colonies,⁹⁶ several of the missionaries and preachers had publicly expressed Tory sentiments. Martin Rodda indiscreetly distributed the King's proclamation of rebellion around his circuit.⁹⁷ Rankin changed his mind about leaving the Colonies by the end of the month, informing Asbury by a letter received on August 22,⁹⁸ but ultimately Colonial anger over their political sentiments compelled their exit from the Colonies.

On the Brunswick Circuit, Asbury's travels were more structured than his work in the Norfolk area. During this period he was more faithful in *Journal* entries recording his work. He often indicates daily mileage, the size of congregations, and the name of chapels and homes and meetinghouses where he preached.

First Asbury stopped at the house of "Mr. Mason," who had erected Mason's Chapel in Brunswick County. Conferences were held there in 1785 and 1801. It was one of the earliest Brunswick preaching places. Asbury records a visit to Samuel Yeargan's Chapel in Brunswick County on November 5, where he met George Shadford. He reached the Quarterly Meeting on November 7, location uncertain, after difficulty fording the Meherrin River. After spending a day with Shadford, on November 10 he preached at Benjamin Johnson's, another of the earliest Brunswick societies. On Sunday, November 12, he preached at Mabry's Chapel in Greenville County, formed out of Brunswick County. Mabry's was considered the fourth Methodist chapel in Virginia.⁹⁹

This was the circuit rider pattern in mature form. He would travel about 10 or 12 miles a day and preach in the evening. Sometimes this was every

evening. Gradually the preaching appointments became structured and regular. On November 14 he preached at Mr. Cox's and Boisseau's Chapel in Dinwiddie County, the third oldest Methodist chapel in Virginia. On Sunday, November 26, he was again at Mabry's exactly a week after his previous visit. On November 29 he was again at Boisseau's. On this occasion he met the wife of Devereux Jarratt. His first recorded visit to Petersburg was only on December 3, when he preached there twice. White's in Amelia was another preaching place at this time.¹⁰⁰

Asbury apparently didn't preach at Ellis's Chapel in Sussex County until December 9. This was the seventh oldest meetinghouse in Virginia, and a few years later would be the location for the three meetings (1782, 1783, and 1784) of the Southern Conference immediately prior to the Christmas Conference. He preached twice in Lane's Chapel on December 10 in their "new house," 30 feet by 24. On December 21 he rode 12 miles to the meetinghouse erected by Robert Jones in Sussex County, the fifth Methodist Chapel in Virginia. This preaching appointment was a "mistake" Asbury attributed to William Glendinning, and he had to travel 13 miles more to Owen's, where he preached at night. The last day of the year, December 31, he conducted a watch-night service at Yeargan's Chapel, where he had begun his Brunswick work.¹⁰¹

Early in 1776 Asbury met Mr. and Mrs. Jarratt at Boisseau's Chapel; they gave an account of Shadford's massive evangelistic success. Though it was now January 10, Jarratt and Asbury held a "watch-night," and each preached for about two hours. On Sunday, January 14, Asbury records attendance at an Established Church where he heard a minister characterized only as "parson H," probably revealing Asbury did not fully approve of the man.¹⁰²

Rankin sent Asbury a letter which he received on January 24, calling him back to Philadelphia by March 1.¹⁰³ By this time several of the Brunswick preaching places were already firmly planted. Yeargan's, Ellis's, Petersburg, Boisseau's, Jarratt's own White Oak Chapel, Mabry's, and Lane's were each mentioned on several occasions. Jarratt was still deeply involved in Methodist work. One of Asbury's last actions during his Brunswick work, for example, was a 40-mile ride on February 12 to see Jarratt and to preach at White Oak. On February 23 Asbury began the long journey to Philadelphia by way of Leesburg.¹⁰⁴

The Revolutionary Era and the Fluvanna Controversy

The revival didn't end with the Revolution, but the wartime pattern of appointments and growth was less orderly. During part of this period the war intervened in precisely this area of Virginia. Several of the military atrocities of Colonel Banistre Tarleton took place in Southside Virginia and upper North Carolina. Today Tarleton's actions would be called "terrorism," but Methodists were not singled out for special punishment. British proclamation of slave emancipation was considered particularly barbarous.¹⁰⁵ Other

activities such as the burning of crops and incidental violence against civilians are no longer considered violations of the laws of war. Some of Tarleton's raids were similar to those of William T. Sherman, U.S. Grant, and Philip Sheridan during the War Between the States. Philip Bruce, a Methodist preacher in North Carolina, was a particular target of Tarleton, but Bruce was a known patriot spy.¹⁰⁶

British guerilla tactics generated widespread fear among citizens of this region. Southside was sometimes a source of food for the armies of Washington and other patriot officers.¹⁰⁷ Tarleton's troops and Tory units were particularly vigorous in Southside crop destruction immediately prior to the siege of Yorktown. Farmers and planters were unable to grow their accustomed tobacco because of the thorough blockade by British naval vessels, so they had switched to food crops for the patriot army.

It has been noted that Methodists supplied their share of personnel for militia service. Some preachers carried muskets but some refused. Jesse Lee tells a dramatic story of being drafted for service, being jailed when he refused to bear arms, and his release from jail to drive a supply wagon.¹⁰⁸ Camp life was considered incompatible with religious conviction. In camp, a Methodist layman or preacher would encounter not only the hardships of war but immoral companions. Gambling, alcohol, and blasphemy were common. Since many failed to uphold their Methodist convictions, when soldiers returned to civilian life they were subjected to an examination regarding their wartime experience.¹⁰⁹

The Revolution was a factor in the first great controversy among Methodist preachers. As yet no Methodist preachers in America had been ordained, and thus none was considered qualified to conduct the sacraments. A few preachers, notably Robert Strawbridge, administered the Lord's Supper anyway without authorization.¹¹⁰ However, Methodists including the preachers were expected to attend Anglican services faithfully and receive the Sacrament from the Established clergy, as well as attend Methodist preaching, love feasts, class meetings, and other events. In Virginia prior to the Revolution most Methodists lived within a reasonable distance of some Anglican parish, and thus compliance with this duty was not difficult.

By 1776 or 1777, however, many of the Anglican clergy had fled from patriot discipline or detention. The result was that Methodists no longer received the Sacrament. Agitation regarding the need for the sacraments grew, in part because deliberately incited by a few aggressive preachers. These preachers included several of the legendary preachers who had had such great success in recruiting converts on the Brunswick Circuit. In fact, the recruitment of converts and the enlistment of preachers were two parts of the same preaching theme. In a pattern still familiar in the early 21st century, some persons have difficulty in distinguishing God's call to commitment from God's call to full-time Christian service.

Thus by early 1779 many preachers were on the verge of dissent regarding the Sacrament. By this time Asbury was firmly in control of American

Methodism, the other Wesley missionaries having returned to England.¹¹¹ In any internal church struggle, however, Asbury suffered from a significant disadvantage in that he could not travel outside Delaware. From early 1778 until April 1780 he spent most of his time in Delaware, though he made occasional forays into Maryland. This was a kind of exile imposed because he refused to take an oath of allegiance to the patriot cause.

Some have estimated patriot sentiment as only one-third of the population, with another third favoring the Tory cause and the final part indifferent.¹¹² In most Colonies, patriots, whatever their numbers, were making most political decisions. If Asbury had held strong Tory views he probably would have returned to England with the other missionaries. His decision to remain in America and continue evangelistic work suggests that he preferred to avoid involvement in political activity.

Asbury's "exile" may have been partly self-imposed. Whatever the circumstances, from November 1778 until April 1780 his sanctuary was the home of Judge Thomas White in Witleysburg, Kent County, Delaware. White was a magistrate who firmly supported Methodism and gave protection to Methodist itinerants. While he was unable to travel his participation in church politics was limited mainly to writing letters. The fear of patriot detention or violence was real, however. Methodist preachers were imprisoned as near as Annapolis. Judge White himself was jailed for a time.¹¹³

Even though he could not travel, Asbury learned that the sacramental issues would be considered at the Southern Conference session set for Fluvanna County, Virginia, in the spring of 1779. He opposed permitting unordained preachers to conduct sacramental life. The Fluvanna preachers subtly overcame the objection to unordained persons administering the Sacrament by agreeing to ordain one another. Ordination, irregular by most standards, would confer authority to offer the Sacrament.

Asbury often engaged in political activities within the church, though he was probably skeptical about personal participation in political life outside the church. His response to the brewing controversy was to summon preachers to an irregular conference held in Kent, Delaware, on April 28, 1779. His invitation to this conference was sent mainly to northern preachers, and included only a few of the southern preachers expected to gather at Fluvanna on May 18.¹¹⁴

In those days any Methodist conference session was considered competent to act for the whole American connection. So the Kent Conference was intended to pre-empt whatever action might be taken at Fluvanna. As expected, the preachers who gathered at Kent opposed conferring sacramental authority. This did not forestall the anticipated action of the southern preachers at Fluvanna three weeks later, who agreed to form a presbytery and ordain one another to secure sacramental authority. The result was a rift between Asbury and the southern preachers who were serving circuits along the old Brunswick area.

Released from exile in April 1780, Asbury immediately repaired to Virginia and North Carolina, where he spent several weeks meeting the Fluvanna preachers individually and trying to persuade them that sacramental authority for traveling preachers was not part of the "old Methodist plan." Most of these preachers agreed to be patient, though a few, including Strawbridge, continued to offer the Lord's Supper.¹¹⁵

After the Revolution

By 1780 the American Revolution was winding down. Cornwallis' army was on its way to surrender at Yorktown, and, although British occupation of Southside Virginia was cruel, French entry into the war promised ultimate patriot victory. The Tory cause seemed lost, particularly in Virginia.

Most Establishment clergy by 1780 had lost everything. As early as 1775 the first Republican legislature in Virginia had proposed an end to church "rates," that is, mandatory tithes enacted from all landowners to support the clergy.¹¹⁶ Full "disestablishment" was proposed by Governor Thomas Jefferson and eventually approved by the legislature. As a result of disestablishment, few Anglican clergy had sources of income.

Many Established clergy fled their parishes anyway, fearing patriot action, probably with good reason. The departure of so many clergy meant that in many parts of Virginia by the 1780s the sacraments had not been available for several years. The demand for baptism was so high that Richard Whatcoat, later a bishop, conducted 75 baptisms in one day.¹¹⁷ Even if they had "remained at their posts," the number of parishioners had dwindled. Active Anglican parishioners, including many large and wealthy landowners, probably disproportionately held Tory political sentiments. It has been noted that the coincidence of political dissent and deist beliefs among the clergy made it easy for opponents of Establishment to accuse the clergy of atheism and "irreligion."

By the climax of the war in 1780 and 1781 many Established churches in Virginia had stood empty for several years. Some of them were taken over by dissenters or Methodists. Others were deteriorating due to lack of physical maintenance. Some of these sects and denominations simply squatted in the Anglican property. In other cases the land and buildings were confiscated through patriot court action.¹¹⁸ These were among the many Tory claims eventually settled by the bargain basement negotiations of a young lawyer from Fauquier County, Virginia, John Marshall, for the enormous fee of 50,000 acres of land.¹¹⁹

Methodists "inherited" a number of these former "chapels of ease" and official parish churches. Some of these were later taken over by Quakers and followers of James O'Kelly after his 1792 schism. In a few cases the new occupants may have bought the property. Often Methodist meetinghouses in this period were "union chapels," shared by several sects and denominations, in a pattern modeled by the *de facto* sharing of former Established property.

The wartime disruption of circuit life in Southside thus was returning to a "normal" structure by the time Cornwallis surrendered in 1781. Even in the midst of bitter hostilities, privation, and occupation, though, the Southside revival had not come to an end. Numerical growth continued during otherwise dark days. Hundreds of people came to hear Methodist preachers.

On Asbury's second extended visit to Southside Virginia and upper North Carolina in 1780 he sometimes preached to large crowds. At Jones' Barn in Halifax County in North Carolina he preached to 100 people on June 17. By June 23 he was meeting 150 spiritually starved people at Nutbush Creek Chapel in Vance County near the Roanoke River. This chapel is now an Episcopal church at a different site in Williamsboro.

On June 24 Asbury preached to 70 people at Colonel Edmund Taylor's on Tar River, probably in Vance County, and on the 25th he preached "with very little liberty" to 400 people at the Tabernacle in Vance County. "Liberty" in preaching was a term used by many early circuit riders, and probably meant an observable response to preaching. Perhaps this term referred to charismatic activity.¹²⁰

These preaching places were all in the Roanoke River watershed. Two weeks later on July 8 he "had liberty in speaking" to a congregation of about 100 at the Cypress Chapel, on the Tar River Circuit, where the appointed preacher was James O'Kelly. This was in Franklin County, North Carolina.¹²¹

On July 9 Asbury met a congregation of 400 at Green Hill's Meeting House. Though not all crowds were large or responsive, sometimes Asbury records preaching to as many as 500 persons. Opportunity for further Methodist expansion was evident, even though some of these massive gatherings represented the gathering of persons from all corners of a circuit, or even a central gathering of persons from more than one of the surrounding counties. Possibly even there were "groupies" who traveled with the preacher or followed the preacher from one preaching appointment to another.

Two hundred heard Asbury at Roades' on July 29, 400 at the Neuse preaching house probably in southeastern Durham County on July 30, and 200 at Hillsboro on August 2, further indications of the success of Methodism.¹²² It is likely that the circuit preachers prepared society members to come to hear their administrator Asbury, who was not considered one of the best preachers in Methodism.

From the earliest days of American Methodism some portion of a typical southern congregation was composed of slaves. The slave membership of Methodist societies in Virginia and North Carolina generally averaged about 30 or 40 percent of the entire membership. Initially slaves were discouraged from attending Methodist meetings¹²³ by their owners and the civil authorities, but John Wesley's firm opposition to slavery was a guiding principle for the first couple of generations of American preachers.¹²⁴

Sometimes Asbury preached to segregated audiences, but his strong opposition to slavery probably meant that usually he preached to mixed congregations. When he traveled with an African American preacher, for example Harry Hosier, sometimes white listeners preferred the black preacher. Several of the early Methodist preachers and a number of slaveholders freed their slaves after the legislature enacted an emancipation law in 1782.¹²⁵ Those preachers included William McKendree and James O'Kelly.¹²⁶ In upper Southampton County a number of planters were receptive to antislavery evangelicalism. One source indicates that the northern part of Southampton was receptive to "antislavery evangelicalism."¹²⁷ Southampton north of the Blackwater River usually voted Whig in the 19th century, while south of the river it was Democratic. Most slaveholders in Southampton, however, lived south of the river.¹²⁸

Asbury met James O'Kelly on this 1780 preaching tour, a meeting that should not go unremarked. O'Kelly had been admitted to the traveling ministry only in 1778. Though he was present at the Fluvanna Conference in 1779 and supported the rights to ordain and administer the sacraments, O'Kelly was still quite junior in status. Subsequent propaganda assigned O'Kelly a major role at Fluvanna, but this seems unlikely in the presence of a number of senior, experienced, and legendary preachers. A listing of the 18 preachers who voted with the majority at Fluvanna puts O'Kelly's name in the 16th position.¹²⁹ The significance of the 1780 meeting between O'Kelly and Asbury was that O'Kelly was in the first days of his long period of work in upper North Carolina and Southside Virginia.

W.W. Bennett claims that O'Kelly shaped events at Fluvanna. More likely Fluvanna shaped O'Kelly and gave him a spirit of independence. Gradually over the years between 1778 and 1792 O'Kelly used his expanding seniority and then authority as elder and Presiding Elder of the Virginia District to accumulate power. He was one of the 12 elders ordained by Asbury at the Christmas Conference in January of 1785.¹³⁰

Much of O'Kelly's power came with the gradual retirement and westward movement of the older preachers. By the time of the 1792 confrontation between Asbury and O'Kelly the latter had become one of the senior preachers in Methodism. He had become the mentor to many of the other Virginia District preachers, and had converted or directed the spiritual lives of most of the preachers in Southside Virginia and the part of North Carolina which participated in the Virginia Conference sessions. Moreover, the Virginia Conference considered itself the "senior" conference by virtue of tradition, the heir of the "Southern Conference" when conferences at Baltimore and Philadelphia were theoretically subordinate.

O'Kelly's leadership was supported by younger preachers whom he had converted or trained. Among his protégés were William McKendree, eventually Asbury's heir in leadership of the whole church, and Rice Haggard. The Virginia District gradually absorbed other districts and by

1787 included several of the North Carolina circuits as well as some of the Virginia circuits. In 1788 the Virginia District included 14 circuits and 23 preachers in eastern North Carolina and southern Virginia. This district extended west to Bedford and south to Camden County, North Carolina. Most of these circuits were south of the James River in what had originally been the old Brunswick Circuit.¹³¹ At one point 28 preachers were under O'Kelly's district supervision.¹³²

John Easter, who had converted McKendree in 1786, Philip Cox, Ira Ellis, Lee Roy Cole, Stephen G. Roszel, and James Meachem were among the preachers at one time or another under O'Kelly's supervision. Politically this was a formidable group; moreover, these men did not itinerate widely, that is, they usually rode circuits in the same general area of Virginia and North Carolina. Several of these preachers had been present at Fluvanna.¹³³

Asbury and O'Kelly both wrote extensive narrative accounts of the controversy between them. Others, including Jesse Lee, filled in details. The mechanical steps toward schism are not in dispute; they have been ably chronicled by others. The reasons for the conflict are more interesting than the details.

Slavery was somehow an issue in the controversy, although the differing positions of Asbury and O'Kelly are not obvious. Officially both men opposed slavery, a position which was demanded by John Wesley.¹³⁴ In fact, O'Kelly's Republican Methodists and the Christian Church continued opposition to slavery.¹³⁵ Moreover, as long as Asbury lived the Methodist Episcopal Church was formally opposed to slavery as well.

The stand of these two men on slavery is difficult to establish because the main primary source is the writings of Jesse Lee, who may not have shared the prevailing Methodist opposition to slavery.¹³⁶ Bennett's pro-slavery views color his 1871 propagandized account of the argument between O'Kelly and Asbury.¹³⁷ Bennett's support for the slave system may have been influenced by the pro-slavery teachings of William A. Smith, his predecessor as President of Randolph-Macon College. Smith was at Randolph-Macon when it was located in Boydton in Southside Virginia not far from the North Carolina border. Boydton, located in Mecklenburg County and well inside the original limits of the Brunswick Circuit, may have been an early preaching place.

Bennett insists that Methodist opposition to slavery was a great impediment to Methodist growth in the late 18th century. He associates a decline in church growth in Virginia with the enforcement of two rules, one against slaveholder membership in Methodist societies, and the other against slaveholder eligibility to be local preachers or traveling itinerants. Bennett suggests that when Asbury met southern hostility on this issue he relaxed enforcement of the rules.¹³⁸

Confirmation that Asbury accommodated slaveholder prejudices might explain several puzzling chapters of early Methodist history, including the

mysterious conflict between Thomas Coke and Asbury. Coke was a vigorous opponent of slavery, preaching often on this subject even in slaveholding territory. He was critical of Devereux Jarratt, whom he accused of being a slaveholder, though he later retracted this charge.¹³⁹ Coke was particularly hostile to the slave trade, as Wesley had been. The slave trade was prohibited by Parliament effective in 1808, and from that point enforcement became a major task of the British Navy. Coincidentally, 1808 was the date set in the Constitution of the United States for abolition of the slave trade, though enforcement by the American Navy was rare.

One might suspect Southside Virginia and the upper tier of North Carolina counties were areas of deep support for slavery. Paradoxically, however, this same territory was a stronghold for Quakers, who were aggressive and public abolitionists.¹⁴⁰ The official history of Southampton County, moreover, reveals that slaveholders attended Methodist meetings in Southampton even though they knew they were not eligible for Methodist membership. Their wives and children joined, but they merely attended, even though they could not secure "tickets" to the Sacrament or to the "love feasts."¹⁴¹

Asbury was reluctant to license slaveholders as local preachers,¹⁴² although his enforcement in Virginia may not have matched the decisive exclusionary policies of the Baltimore Conference recounted by Donald G. Mathews in his book, *Slavery and Methodism*.¹⁴³ Neither did O'Kelly's people welcome slaveholders even after the break with Asbury and the Methodist Episcopal Church between 1792 and 1794. The Republican Methodists and the Christian Church were particularly successful in Southside Virginia and upper North Carolina, demonstrating that restrictions on slaveholders in church office did not seriously interfere with church life and growth over the long term. Slavery was thus not at the heart of the separation between Asbury and O'Kelly, though it may have been a factor.

Nor were theological differences significant. Asbury and Lee insisted that O'Kelly held heretical views, particularly regarding the Trinity, an argument accepted by Bennett in 1871. Evidence for this propagandized view was the near expulsion of two O'Kelly preacher protégés shortly before the 1792 schism. The preachers were "saved" for Methodism when they recanted their heretical ideas.¹⁴⁴ The stated doctrinal positions of the Christian and Congregational churches do not support this allegation. Christian theological positions were conventional and orthodox, particularly regarding the Trinity. Much of early Christian Church theology was in fact Methodist theology rooted in the grace preaching of Wesley.¹⁴⁵ This contrasted with the Reformed and Calvinist preaching prevalent in Virginia in this period.

The schism between O'Kelly and Asbury was probably about power and personality. O'Kelly wrote that his main objection was the power of the episcopacy, particularly the authority to appoint preachers.¹⁴⁶ O'Kelly and many of his preachers wished to remain in long-term preaching appointments. Asbury preferred to rotate his preachers. O'Kelly and his people were

longtime Southside Virginia residents, and hoped to remain in Southside, near family and friends. Asbury was seeking personnel for westward expansion, and recruited many of his most effective pioneers from this hotbed of evangelistic growth and enthusiasm. Another preacher, Thomas Ware, professed agreement with some of O'Kelly's goals but disliked his tactics in pursuing those goals.¹⁴⁷ O'Kelly also objected to Asbury's solicitation of funds to establish Cokesbury College and other projects.¹⁴⁸ Funding for the 1782 establishment of Ebenezer Academy in Brunswick County, the first Methodist school in America, may have been a similar sore point for O'Kelly.¹⁴⁹ Nicholas Snethen believed that O'Kelly was angry because Asbury had refused to publish a manuscript O'Kelly had written. One recent secondary source suggests that the conflict between O'Kelly and Asbury was aggravated because O'Kelly was Irish and Asbury British.¹⁵⁰

The controversy was long developing. It burst into the open in the late 1780s, partly over a proposal for a regular General Conference of all preachers, which would meet periodically to make church law superceding the authority of individual "conferences" or "districts."

In response to rising demand for a democratic General Conference and the limitation of appointive power, Asbury was coerced into establishing a "council" of senior preachers in 1790. O'Kelly was a member of this body, but when the council was summoned again in 1791 he refused to participate.¹⁵¹ By this time O'Kelly's wedge issue was a proposed right of all preachers to "appeal" appointments or assignments that they believed "injured" them. It should be noted that Wesley had died in April 1791. Prior to Wesley's death the British Conference could not have considered the "appeal" question, but later in 1791 they adopted one. They rarely resorted to it.¹⁵² Edward Drinkhouse provided an alternative account of the O'Kelly schism in his standard history of the Methodist Protestant movement. Drinkhouse believed O'Kelly's concerns foreshadowed 1820s dissent called "Reform." Reform was ultimately the foundation of the Methodist Protestant Church, which separated from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1828-29.¹⁵³ The question of "appeal" was raised at several consecutive General Conference sessions beginning in 1808. One result of the 1808 question was the creation of a delegated General Conference.

"Reform" was unsuccessful within mainline Methodism largely because of unilateral action taken by Bishop William McKendree to veto action of the 1820 General Conference in which appeals were approved. McKendree lobbied hard within several annual conference meetings to overturn the "appeal" system authorized by a majority of preachers who were 1820 delegates.

McKendree's spirited opposition to "Reform" was exceeded by the aggressive tactics of Joshua Soule. Soule had been elected a bishop in 1820 but declined consecration as a tactic to defeat reformers. Soule contended that appeal violated the 1808 "Constitution" of Methodism, which he had

written as a young delegate, a constitution which at that point consisted of the "Restrictive Rules." Soule argued that the right of appeal would limit the power of the bishop to make appointments and thus violate the Restrictive Rule prohibiting alteration or abolition of the episcopacy.

McKendree's firm opposition to "appeal" in the 1820s suggests that there was no direct connection to the O'Kelly proposals of 1792, since McKendree had been one of O'Kelly's firmest supporters in the earlier controversy. O'Kelly's hostility to the episcopacy included other areas of concern, for example the style of dress of Bishop Asbury.

O'Kelly carried many of the Southside preaching places and local preachers out of Methodism into his new connection. Perhaps as many as 21 or even 30 preachers followed O'Kelly, although some of these were local preachers.¹⁵⁴ One modern source contends that 3,000 laypersons went with O'Kelly into the new connection.¹⁵⁵ Lee indicated that 7,352 laypersons and 36 preachers were involved. This was 20 percent of American Methodism at the time.¹⁵⁶

O'Kelly's first name for the new body was "Republican Methodist," and his writing reveals a preference for "democracy" in contrast to what he characterized as the monarchical style of Asbury. The name "Republican" was an explicit reference to O'Kelly's belief that he and Thomas Jefferson had similar concerns. O'Kelly and Jefferson truly met,¹⁵⁷ but evidence is lacking that Jefferson was a particular supporter of O'Kelly. Jefferson after all was a public deist and his theological views were substantially different from O'Kelly's rather conventional orthodoxy.

Bennett tried to minimize the impact of O'Kelly's new connection on the Southside Virginia Methodist preaching places, but O'Kelly for a decade or two managed to alienate quite a number of Methodist societies and congregations in the Old Brunswick area of Southside, possibly even a majority.¹⁵⁸ This had substantial impact on Methodist membership growth in this period. Many of the resulting congregations and meetings, however, failed to remain in the control of O'Kelly and his successors. Perhaps this was owing to the "republican" spirit, largely congregational in polity. Congregations were in most ways independent of one another and wary of any central authority. At an early meeting in 1794, the name "Republican Methodist" was changed to "The Christian Church," although some congregations seceded from this group and kept the name Republican Methodist.

The Christian Church sprang from two other main sources, Barton Stone in Tennessee and Abner Jones in New England. Since Stone began as a Presbyterian pastor and is also listed among the founders of the Disciples of Christ, there is often confusion regarding the relationship of Disciples, Congregationalist, and Christian churches. Individual congregations sometimes moved from one association to another, or buildings were abandoned and taken over by another connection. Sometimes Methodist Protestant congregations took over the same real estate. Several mergers and schisms

of these bodies also took place. Some of the congregations concerned even became Baptist, suggesting that theological uniformity was not a major concern.¹⁵⁹

Thus the origins of these denominations are mingled together. Many of them united with New England Congregationalists in 1931 to establish the Congregational-Christian Church, and then formed a large part of the United Church of Christ in the 1950s. The present Congregational-Christian Church consists of 70 churches,¹⁶⁰ mostly in Southside Virginia, the Virginia Peninsula, and North Carolina.

Conclusion

The significance of the Old Brunswick Circuit cannot be overstated. It was a model for evangelistic growth and administrative organization. It was a recruiting ground for future leadership. The Brunswick Circuit was proof that Methodists could be successful as a rural movement. As a result, a large percentage of the preachers always have been assigned to rural circuits, and almost every preacher to this day spends at least a few years under rural pastoral appointment.

The background of the Brunswick Circuit area may help explain why evangelistic growth there in the 1770s and 1780s was sudden and dramatic. It was not long removed from the frontier because of *de facto* Indian reservations from which natives were relocated as late as the 1750s. Slavery was profitable in no other part of Virginia, but was considered essential for the prevalent tobacco planting and farming of the 18th century. It may be difficult to ascertain the manner in which slavery influenced Methodist growth, but it was such a pervading factor that its influence is almost self-evident.

The infectious personalities of George Whitefield and Devereux Jarratt were additional influences. These aggressive men could not be denied, and they generally refused to recognize opposition. Many were attracted to them and thus available for recruitment when Methodism was formally offered by the first circuit riders in Petersburg and Brunswick.

The widespread use of river systems as highways and for transportation of crops and goods was another factor. The peculiarities of Virginia political divisions were particularly conducive to a rural movement. The Anglican vestrymen had substantial local power, and thus county divisions became the logical basis for the development of circuit ministry. Cities, however, were not subject to county political authority, but on the other hand urban leaders were not able to exert leadership in rural society. Moreover, rural society itself was being shaped during these embryonic frontier days.

While the 18th century may not have been as "irreligious" as Methodist propaganda alleged, it is probably true that some Established clergy were gamblers, drinkers, and foxhunters. Moreover, some of them were professed deists, denying the immanence of God and thus apparently worshipping a God

who was disinterested in human affairs. The fact that many clergy and lay vestrymen held Tory political views, however, may explain the virulence of Methodist disgust, particularly after Methodists stopped participating in Anglican sacramental life.

The ownership of 10,000 acres of Southside land by The College of William and Mary may also have influenced Methodist growth. The tobacco culture of this region, which brought slavery, was another factor. The origins of the revival in the Petersburg hinterland may have been extremely important. Methodism's unique ambiguity in relationship to the Anglican Establishment may have been a crucial advantage.

Several Irish preachers resided in Virginia, men who had already traveled a Wesleyan circuit. The extensive work of Jarratt may have been an overwhelming precondition, not apparent to the modern age because most churches no longer presume extensive preparation for evangelistic work.

Methodists were willing to employ lay preachers in evangelistic work, thus distinguishing themselves from Anglican tradition. Remarkably, Jarratt welcomed the untrained lay preachers. Preachers realized early that river valleys were among the most important transportation routes. Other factors included the saturation mission strategy, the high motivation level of circuit preachers, and the chance role of the Revolution in removing control of Methodism from the hands of Tory missionaries and leaving it by default in the strange but effective organizational administration of Francis Asbury.

Methodism was most successful in Virginia, a Colony with deep Anglican roots. Perhaps this guaranteed level competition. Additional opportunity was created when the Established Church was summarily terminated at the end of the Revolution, leaving a good deal of property to Methodists by default.

Other themes have been considered due to their implications for future Methodist events. The Wesleyan grace theology may have been well suited to rural and pioneer people expecting social mobility. The wartime terrorism in Southside and the secularism of camp life have been considered. The mechanics of the first mature rural circuit, the importance of the sacramental controversy at Fluvanna largely among Southside and North Carolina preachers, and the conflicting effects that slavery might have had on patterns of growth have received attention.

O'Kelly's schism signifies dissenting voices regarding the traditional concept of itineration. O'Kelly's aggressive campaign to create a right of "appeal" was attractive to Southside rural circuit preachers whose roots after all were in the same area to which they were frequently appointed. Ultimately history proved that Asbury's rotation system was a superior plan of assignment of preachers for rural circuits, though rather soon station and urban churches and preachers began to demand longer tenure in their pastoral assignments. The rotation system, however, probably was more appropriate for the move westward.

Historians get into trouble when they attempt to apply lessons from the past to contemporary events. Nevertheless, in an age of denominational "benign neglect" for rural churches and rural life, it might be wise to recall that much Methodist success has been in rural and frontier circuit ministry. Suburban growth since World War II has persuaded us that early Methodist success is irrelevant to modern conditions, even though much suburban evangelism is really transfer evangelism. The story of the Old Brunswick Circuit may be cautionary evidence regarding the dangers of neglecting rural society.

Notes

1. *Minutes of Some Conversations between the Preachers in Connection with the Rev. Mr. John Wesley, 1773 and 1774.*
2. *Minutes, 1774 to 1778*; Foster, Talmage D. (ed.), *Sussex County: A Tale of Three Centuries* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1942), 41.
3. Bennett, William W., *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), 30-31.
4. McTyeire, Holland N., *A History of Methodism* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1890), 231; Bennett, 35.
5. Bennett, 36.
6. McTyeire, 232; Bennett, 31-35.
7. Bennett, 41.
8. Bennett, 60.
9. Bennett, 60. Jarratt was 29 years old in 1762.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Sweet, William Warren, *Makers of Christianity: From John Cotton to Lyman Abbott* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1937); Bennett, 60.
12. Sweet, 104.
13. McTyeire, 251; Jones, 54.
14. Petersburg was one of the largest Colonial towns with only 2,800 population.
15. Jones, Richard L., *Dinwiddie County* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1976), 101-102; Neale, Gay, *Brunswick County, 1720-1975* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1975), 93.
16. Bradshaw, Herbert Clarence, *History of Prince Edward County, Virginia, from its Earliest Settlement through its Establishment in 1754 to its Bicentennial Year* (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, Inc., 1955), 238.
17. Bennett, 62, 105; Lee, Jesse, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America, Beginning in 1766, and Continued until 1809, to which is Prefixed a Brief Account of their Rise in England in the Year 1729* (Baltimore: Magill and Cline, 1810), 301, 304. Bridenbaugh, Carl, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Poli-*

- tics, 1689-1775 (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).
18. Bennett, 62; Foster, 41.
 19. Brown, Douglas Summers (ed.), *History and Biographical Sketches of Greensville County Virginia, 1650-1967* (Emporia, Virginia: Riparian Women's Club, 1968), 233; Bennett, 61; Foster, 41.
 20. Jones, 49.
 21. Neale, 35.
 22. Use of the more sensitive term "Native American" would be anachronistic, so the term in use in the 18th century is employed.
 23. Foster, 79.
 24. Hadfield, Kathleen Halverson (ed.), *Historical Notes on Amelia County, Virginia* (Amelia, Virginia: Amelia County Historical Committee, 1982), 4.
 25. Neale, 35; Jones, 39, 45.
 26. Bradshaw, 2-5, 39.
 27. King, Helen Haverty, and others, *Historical Notes on Isle of Wight County* (Isle of Wight, Virginia: Isle of Wight County Board of Supervisors, 1993).
 28. Lesh, Kristin A., "So Well Endowed": *Economic Support of The College of William and Mary During the Colonial Period*. A.B. Honors Thesis, College of William and Mary, 2001, 19, 58, 62, 64; Brown, 4-5.
 29. Jones, 39, 47.
 30. Rountree, Helen C., *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia Through Four Centuries* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 5.
 31. King, 224. Petersburg and Smithfield were "deep-water" ports.
 32. Jones, 39.
 33. *Ibid.*
 34. Jones, 39, 117.
 35. Web site of Census Bureau; the population of Petersburg in the first U.S. Census in 1790 was 2,828, making it the 21st largest city in the new nation; Norfolk in 1790 had only 2,959 residents, making it the 20th largest city in America; the population of rural Southampton County in 1790, by contrast, was 12,864. Southampton, 108. Moreover, the population of Virginia had grown by more than 50% between 1770 and 1790, from an estimated 447,016 to a counted 747,610. From 1790 until 1930, census parameters defined "urban" as a population of 2,500 or more.
 36. Neale, 7.
 37. *Ibid.*
 38. Jones, 50; Drewry, P.H., *The Story of a Church: A History of Washington Street Church* (Petersburg, Virginia: Plummer Printing Co., Inc., 1923), 38.
 39. King, 74-75; Foster, 79.
 40. Hadfield, 3; Neale, 7.
 41. Bennett, 39-40.
 42. McTyeire, 235.
 43. Bennett, 61-62.

44. Bennett, 61.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Bradshaw, 238-239.
47. Brown, 242.
48. Bennett, 82; Moore, 63.
49. Bennett, 50.
50. Presumably King was licensed by Boardman.
51. Moore, Matthew H., *Sketches of the Pioneers of Methodism in North Carolina and Virginia* (Nashville, Tennessee: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1884), 55.
52. Bennett, 50.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*; Moore, 113.
55. Bennett, 51, 71.
56. Drewry, 43; Bennett, 57; Jones, 102.
57. A "chapel of ease" was a secondary church building in an Anglican parish, which was built to accommodate local planters and lay persons who could not or would not travel regularly to the main church in a parish.
58. Norwood, Frederick A., *The Story of American Methodism: A History of the United Methodists and their Relations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974); Pilmoor, Joseph, *Journal*, 135-203.
59. Bennett, 53; *Minutes of the Conferences, 1773 and 1774*.
60. Bennett, 55.
61. *Minutes*, 1774.
62. *Minutes*, 1773.
63. Bennett, 187.
64. *Minutes*, 1774.
65. *Minutes*, 1773 and 1774.
66. *Minutes*, 1774 and 1775.
67. *Minutes*, 1774, 1775, and 1776.
68. *Minutes*, 1776.
69. *Minutes*, 1775, 1776, and 1777.
70. *Minutes*, 1776 and 1777.
71. *Minutes*, 1777.
72. Bennett, 137-138.
73. *Minutes*, 1779.
74. This James Madison was the cousin of U.S. President James Madison.
75. Bennett, 42.
76. Asbury, Francis, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, Vol. I, 1771 to 1793 (London and Nashville: Epworth Press and Abingdon Press, 1958), 156.
77. Asbury, 156-158.
78. Asbury, 156-163.
79. Asbury, 162.
80. Asbury, 159.
81. Asbury, 157-166.

82. Asbury, 158, 161, 163.
83. *Minutes*, 1774.
84. *Minutes*, 1775.
85. Asbury, 162; Lee, 76-77.
86. Moore, 68.
87. Lee 64; Bennett, 87.
88. Bennett, 242.
89. *Minutes*, 1774; Asbury, 164; Moore, 198.
90. Fenn, Elizabeth A. *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).
91. Asbury, 165-166.
92. Southampton Court House became known as Jerusalem, the destination 50 years later of Nat Turner's insurrection. It lies close to the North Carolina border; the modern name is Courtland.
93. Asbury, 166.
94. *Ibid.*
95. Asbury, 161.
96. Bennett, 99.
97. *Ibid.*
98. Asbury, 163.
99. Asbury, 166-168.
100. Asbury, 167-170.
101. Asbury, 170-171.
102. Asbury, 175-176.
103. Asbury, 178. Probably Rankin hoped or assumed that Asbury would return to England with the other seven "official" Wesley missionaries.
104. Asbury, 178-179.
105. Selby, John E., *The Revolution in Virginia: 1775-1783* (Williamsburg, Virginia: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988), 65-67.
106. Selby, 181.
107. Selby, 273, 292.
108. Lee, 39; Bennett, 191-193.
109. Bennett, 137-138.
110. Bennett, 110.
111. Rankin had departed in September 1777.
112. Bennett, 98.
113. Asbury, 265.
114. Bennett, 114.
115. Asbury, 345-383.
116. Bennett, 45.
117. Moore, 209.
118. MacClenny, Wilbur E., *James O'Kelly and the Early History of the Christian Church* (Raleigh, North Carolina: Edwards & Broughton, 1910), 145; Crofts, Daniel W., *Old Southampton: Politics and Society in a Virginia County, 1834-1869* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 441.

119. Smith, Jean Edward, *John Marshall: Definer of a Nation* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1996), 167-168.
120. Asbury, 357-360.
121. Asbury, 364.
122. Asbury, 364-371.
123. Bennett, 547.
124. Bennett, 130; Lee, 133.
125. King, 134; Brown, 113.
126. Bennett, 133-34; Stokes, Durward T. and Scott, William T., *A History of the Christian Church in the South* (Burlington, North Carolina: Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ, 1975), 7.
127. Crofts, 5, 108-109.
128. Crofts, 147, 151.
129. Asbury, 381.
130. *Minutes*, 1784.
131. *Minutes*, 1785-1788; Lee, 59, 60, 67.
132. Kilgore, Charles Franklin, *The James O'Kelly Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Mexico City: Casa Unida de Publicaciones, 1963), 5.
133. *Minutes*, 1785-1792.
134. Bennett, 130.
135. Kilgore, 32; Snowa, Walter S., *James O'Kelly: A Successor to Christians at Antioch*, Address, March 14, 2001, 2, 4.
136. Lee, 133, 222.
137. Bennett, 130, 161.
138. Bennett, 136.
139. Moore, 144.
140. Bowden, James, *The History of the Society of Friends in America*, 2 Vols. (London: Charles Gilsin, 1850), 50.
141. Crofts, 5.
142. McTyeire, 388.
143. Mathews, Donald G., *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1965).
144. Bennett, 307, 316; Lee, 58.
145. Morrill, Milo True, *A History of the Christian Denomination in America, 1794-1911* (Dayton, Ohio: The Christian Publishing Association, 1912), 92.
146. Kilgore, 32.
147. McTyeire, 405.
148. MacClenny, 72.
149. Smith, John Abernathy, "Ebenezer Academy: A Methodist School for Virginia," *Virginia United Methodist Heritage*, Vol. 17, Number 2, Fall 1991 (Richmond: Virginia Conference Historical Society, 1991).
150. Snowa, 2, 5.
151. MacClenny, 71.
152. MacClenny, 88.

153. Drinkhouse, Edward J., *History of Methodist Reform: Synoptical of General Methodism 1703 to 1898 with Special and Comprehensive Reference to its Most Salient Exhibition in the History of the Methodist Protestant Church*, 2 vols. (Pittsburgh: Norwood Press, 1899).
154. Stokes, 27.
155. MacClenny, 123-124.
156. Stokes, 8.
157. MacClenny, 114, 171; King, 297.
158. Bennett, 330, 337, 367, 548; MacClenny, 146.
159. Stokes; Morrill, 92; MacClenny, 171; Kilgore; Stone, Barton Warren, *History of the Christian Church in the West* (Lexington, Kentucky: The College of the Bible, 1956).
160. See Web site of the Congregational Christian Church.

History in the Making

Happy Anniversary. Church anniversaries are often called to our attention. Here are some of the most recent:

- 230th - Monumental, Portsmouth
- 170th - Roberts Memorial, Alexandria
- 150th - Leesburg
Shady Grove, Short Pump, Richmond District
- 135th - Mt. Zion, Leesburg
- 85th - Ginter Park, Richmond
- 50th - Culmore, Falls Church
Brookland, Richmond

But Leesburg and Mt. Zion are descendants of Leesburg Station, the "Old Stone Church," which dated from 1766.

Methodism's most notable anniversary, however, will be the **Wesley Tercentenary**; yes, June 2003 will mark the 300th anniversary of John Wesley's birth.

Conference Center. Agencies and headquarters offices of the Conference have completed the move into the new Virginia Conference Center on Staples Mill Road in Glen Allen, a suburb of Richmond.

First home for Conference offices was "over the store" at Fifth and Grace Streets, Richmond. The 1921 building owned by the Methodist Publishing House was the home of Richmond's Cokesbury store, with Conference offices on upper floors. The resident bishop's office was on the fifth floor. When the Publishing House needed the use of the entire building in 1960, it terminated the lease of its longtime tenant. Following the gift of land from the Methodist Children's Home (now United Methodist Family Services) on West Broad Street, the Conference built and occupied its new building by January 1961. Conference offices outgrew the West Broad Street space years ago.

Conference Archives. Along with other agencies, the Conference Archives is still settling into new quarters, and the Conference archivist has embarked on the processing of a mountain of materials long held at bay by the paralyzing lack of space in the former building.

Quarters for the Virginia Conference Archives were made possible by a most generous gift from Raymond Fitzhugh Wrenn, historian and retired member of the Conference, for whom the Archives room is to be named. Also yet to come: first-floor exhibit space to display some of the collection of historic items long stored away for lack of a secure exhibit facility.