

Archives and History, Commission on

There were only a few Methodists in America in 1765, and not an ordained preacher among them. Spontaneously, and almost simultaneously, a revival fire was kindled in three sections remote from each other — Captain Webb, an English soldier and "a man of fire" preached in Albany; Philip Embury, through the exhortations of Barbara Heck, preached in a rigging loft in New York; and Robert Strawbridge preached and formed classes in Maryland.

In 1769, John King, an English local preacher began the work in Baltimore, using for his pulpit a blacksmith's anvil block. Robert Williams hearing of the encouraging work in the New World hastened to New York in 1769, and a little later came to Maryland, where he helped form a noble trio of Irish Methodist preachers, Strawbridge, King, and Williams. For two years they formed classes and laid the foundations of Methodism there. In 1771 they were joined by Asbury. William Watters, converted the same year, and at once an exhorter, joined them as a traveling preacher. This little band of eight rapidly multiplied into hundreds and thousands.

The three lay preachers from Ireland, Robert Williams a street vender, Robert Strawbridge a farmer and John King a doctor were the only Methodist preachers in Maryland until William Watters was converted and joined them. He was the first American born Methodist circuit rider.

As soon as the early converts of Methodism believed "they spake."

Blessed with the assurance that they were right with God, they heeded God's call, "Whom shall I send and who will go for me?" In those days Methodist classes had no regular preaching. The advancement of the work was dependent upon such meetings as the converts themselves could lead.

Robert Williams, the apostle of Methodism to Virginia and North Carolina, one of Wesley's local preachers in Ireland was stationed at John Street in New York until November 1769, when Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor arrived as Wesley's appointed missionaries. (*"The Journeys of Robert Williams" is story (history) and stories (historical fiction) about this Irish street preacher and Methodist circuit rider. Dr. John Bergland has compiled and edited this book published in April 2010.*)

Robert Williams was planning a preaching tour through Maryland and Virginia. He invited William Watters to join him on this missionary journey. It was on the 16th day of October, 1772, Billy Watter's twenty-first birthday, that they set out. Their destination was Norfolk, Virginia, noted for its depravity and wickedness. Watters had been a Christian about a year and a half,

His departure was an emotional scene. His mother, owner of a plantation and widowed for the second time, offered him all her property if he would remain with her. But he left it all to become a Methodist circuit rider, saying that his brothers would affectionately care for his mother.

Many of his friends wept and hung round him. Surrounded by weeping friends and deeply moved by the pleas of his mother, he spoke these words. "I found such resignation and so clear a conviction that my way was of the Lord, that I was enabled to commit them and myself to the care of our Heavenly Father, in humble confidence that if we never met again in this vale of tears, we should soon meet where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest."

"He stood at the gate, his noble steed in hand, bidding adieu to the circle of friends) reserving his mother to the last, who, weeping upon his neck, received his farewell kiss; then he mounted and rode away, thus

introducing the long unbroken line and unparalleled achievements of the American circuit riders." He went out to strange land, without a church, without a people, without a promise of support, that he might proclaim God's saving grace.

"Not by their stations are God's heroes known."

Robert Williams formed the Bruswick circuit along the Roanoke River in 1773. It became the cradle of Methodism in the south

The Commission on Archives and History and the North Carolina Historical Society, remembering the past and embracing the future, met in two of our historic church buildings for the fall of 2009 and spring of 2010 meetings. In October we were hosted by the Campground UMC in Fayetteville. In April we met at Pleasant Green UMC. Both of these churches preserve historic buildings more than a hundred years old.

Our Conference Historian, Dr. Bill Simpson and Rev Dennis Lamb, Vice President of the Commission have provided leadership and yeoman service for the transfer of Archives to the new Methodist Building.

Mildred Swain, President of the Historical Society, has given effective leadership for their meetings and has chaired a planning committee for our "Workshop for Church Historians." The meeting will be at Wilson First UMC October 2, 2010. Excellent leadership will provide training for recording oral histories and employing computers to research and store history. The Workshop is free.

Our annual conference journals across the years have published memoriums for deceased ministers and minister's widows. Too frequently the requested obituaries are not received by the conference secretary. Many memoriums have been omitted from the journals. Dr. Bill Simpson, Conference Historian, working with the conference secretary, has completed more than a hundred of the missing tributes and has submitted them to the secretary. This is a fine service to our conference.

Rev. Arthur Warren, pastor at Murfreesboro UMC is president of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society. He led the meeting at Lake Junaluska in 2009 and will lead the gathering in Jackson, Mississippi, July 2010. The national meeting of The Methodist Historical Society will meet in Seattle Washington.

Two of the 41 recognized Historical Sites of Methodism are located in the bounds of the North Carolina Conference. Whitakers Chapel at Enfield and The Green Hill House at Louis burg. Both were meeting places for General conferences of the church.

Respectfully submitted, Dr. John K Bergland, Chairman of the Commission