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THE FIRST M. E. CHURCH ELDERS

Compiled & Edited
By Duane V. Maxey

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INTRODUCTION

This compilation presents biographical sketches of the First Ordained Elders of the Methodist Episcopal Church -- elected to this office at the Christmas Conference of 1784 when the Church was organized. Some of these first Elders were ordained at that conference; some were ordained following it. While their history does not eclipse the 19 to 24 years of American Methodist history prior to their ordination, it does tell us much about the M. E. Church at the birth of its organization. As with some leaders in other organizations, not all of this group turned out for the best:-- one especially fell to horrible depths, and another created a major split from the M. E. Church, but most accounts will tell a better story and can be a source of real inspiration to the reader.

These compilations were created from the writings of various different Early Methodist historians and biographers, the four most used sources being the writings of Nathan Bangs, John Lednum, Abel Stevens, and Ezra Squier Tipple. All of the material for them was gathered from digital publications found in our HDM Digital Library. I do not claim to be the author, but simply the compiler and editor. I have freely mixed and mingled the writings of others and interspersed some occasional words of my own in these sketches.

My aim has been to borrow from each that which would add details to each sketch, so as to bring out from the midst of different sources one sketch including, if possible, more facts about the individual than are found in any one of the original source sketches. Bangs, Lednum, and Stevens often divided their information about a single individual into a number of different locations in their texts, giving in each location that information about the person relative to the events of that particular portion of M. E. history. My aim therefore, has also been to gather these scattered

details about an individual, so as to create a cohesive and distinct life sketch of a person in one, chronological unit, thereby making it easy to focus upon and read the information about that person's life.

Further, it is my hope that the material in this compilation will stimulate an interest in reading entirely the Early American Methodist publications in the HDM Digital Library. If you have not already done so, why not begin soon to read through these works? You will find therein many items that will not only be a source of personal inspiration, but that will as well provide you with good illustrative material for your Christian work. For the benefit of those who may wish to begin reading through them, at the end of this file I have placed a listing of other publications in the HDM Library pertinent to Early American Methodism. -- DVM

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The sketches of the First M. E. Elders in this compilation are presented in the alphabetical order of their last names, and the arrangement has nothing to do with their standing in the Church nor their preeminence among their peers. Perhaps the most outstanding one of these Elders was Freeborn Garrettson. Yet, his sketch appears as the others -- in its alphabetical location, and, the sketch of Beverly Allen appears first, though his sad fall and fate would better classify him as last in the order.

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Part 1
BEVERLY ALLEN

The story of Beverly Allen is a sad one indeed. He did not attend the Christmas Conference of 1784, but was elected to the office of Elder by the decision of that conference and was ordained afterwards. Soon, however, he fell from Methodist honor into shame, expulsion, murder, the status of an escaped criminal, Universalism, and from all indications finally into eternal damnation!

Protestant Methodist historian, Edward J. Drinkhouse, conjectured that at one point Beverly Allen was mentioned by Asbury to Wesley for the high position of Bishop:

"In 1786, Mr. Asbury complained of the long Latin word superintendent, and wished it to be termed bishop. This was not all; but he proposed to the Rev. Mr. Wesley, Mr. T., Mr. W., and Mr. A., as three persons to be appointed bishops for the United States to act under Mr. Asbury ... Examining the minutes of that period, and of the eligible elders whose reputation would make them a likely choice with Asbury, Mr. T. was John Tunnell; Mr. W., Richard Whatcoat; and Mr. A., Beverly Allen."

It is said that Wesley turned down the proposal, which according to the interpretation of Drinkhouse would have made Beverly Allen a Bishop in the M. E. Church. However, whether this conjecture by Drinkhouse is correct or not, it is a fact that Beverly Allen was elevated to a position of honor in the Early M. E. Church. In 1781 he was admitted into the Itinerancy. Following the Christmas Conference, in the latter part of April 1785, he was ordained by Asbury, in presence of his southern brethren, first to deacon's and then to elder's orders -- supposed to be the first ordinations in the North Carolina Conference. He had been a devout and successful preacher, a man of extraordinary talents and, a correspondent of Wesley, and was now a leader of the southern ranks of the ministry.

Beverly Allen was commissioned to introduce Methodism into Georgia, and in the Minutes his name stood as its solitary itinerant for that whole state. The next year he reported seventy-eight members there. For some years his influence rose continually in Georgia and South Carolina. He became the most prominent representative of Methodism in all that part of the country, having "an almost unparalleled popularity as a preacher." He married into a highly respectable family, and became prominent in the community of Charleston, but in 1792 his name stands in the Minutes as expelled." One M. E. historian says that his expulsion was "for immoral conduct," and this is confirmed by another record that reads: "for immorality."

Beverly Allen fell, in his strength and success, and his fall stunned for years his denomination in Charleston and all the neighboring regions. He sunk from bad to worse, and it was charitably supposed that he was insane. Two years after his expulsion he shot an eminent citizen, the marshal of the Federal Court of Georgia, who attempted to serve a writ upon him. He was imprisoned, and in peril of his life.

Under the date of January 20, 1794 in Asbury's Journal, we find the following comments by Bishop Asbury about this sad state of affairs:

"Poor Beverly Allen, who has been going from bad to worse these seven or eight years, speaking against me to preachers and people, and writing to Mr. Wesley and Dr. Coke, and being thereby the source of most of the mischief that has followed, is now secured in jail for shooting Major Forsyth through the head. The major was marshal for the federal court in Georgia, and was about to serve a writ upon Allen. The masterpiece of all is, a petition is prepared declaring him to have shown marks of insanity previous to his killing the major! The poor Methodists also must unjustly be put to the rack on his account, although he has been expelled from among us these two years. I have had my opinion of him these nine years; and gave Dr. Coke my thoughts of him before his ordination. I pity, I pray for him, that, if his life be given up to justice, his soul may yet be saved."

Some of Beverly Allen's friends signed a petition in his behalf; alleging that he was a maniac. He escaped from the prison and disappeared in the new settlements of the far West. The early records of Methodism represent his final fate as lost in obscurity; but Peter Cartwright one of the most notable pioneers of the western itinerancy throws a gleam of lurid light upon his wretched end.

"My father," writes this veteran, "sent me to school, boarding me at Dr. Beverly Allen's; but my teacher was not well qualified to teach correctly, and I made but small progress. I, however, learned to read, write, and cipher a little, but very imperfectly. Dr. Allen, with whom I boarded, had, in an early day, been a traveling preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church. He was sent South to Georgia, as a very gentlemanly and popular preacher, and did much good. He married in that country a fine, pious woman, a member of the Church; but he, like David, in an evil hour, fell into sin, violated the laws of the country, and a writ was issued for his apprehension.

"He warned the sheriff not to enter his room, and assured him if he did he would kill him. The sheriff rushed upon him, and Allen shot him dead. He fled from that country to escape justice, and settled in Logan County, Kentucky, then called 'Rogues' Harbor.' His family followed him, and

here he practiced medicine. To ease a troubled conscience he drank in the doctrine of Universalism; but he lived and died a great friend to the Methodist Church.

"It fell to my lot, after I had been a preacher several years, to visit the doctor on his dying bed. I talked to and prayed with him. Just before he died I asked him if he was willing to die and meet his final Judge with his Universalist sentiments. He frankly said he was not. He said he could make the mercy of God cover every case in his mind but his own, but he thought there was no mercy for him; and in this state of mind he left the world, bidding his family and friends an eternal farewell, warning them not to come to that place of torment to which he felt himself eternally doomed."

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Part 2 LE ROY COLE

Mr. Lee Roy Cole was a native of Virginia, born in 1749. In the year of his conversion he united with the Methodists and he was received into the traveling ministry in 1777. Apparently by the decision of the Christmas Conference of 1784, he was appointed as one of the first Elders of the M. E. Church. However, one historian stated that he was ordained soon after the Conference.

In 1785, he was expelled. I found no reason stated for this action. However, soon after his expulsion, he was restored to the traveling connection -- probably from a conviction that he had been improperly disowned. He served the Methodist Church as a traveling or local preacher for more than fifty years.

In the latter end of his life, he located and moved into Clarke county, Kentucky. Being much devoted to the work of God, he became zealously engaged in promoting revivals, and he appointed a camp meeting in the neighborhood of Cynthiana, in Harrison county.

For the first and second days every thing tended to discourage them -- the rain descended in torrents, and a company of rude young men came on the ground, with bottles of whiskey in their pockets, evidently determined on mischief. The friends of religion, however, persevered in their work, and on Saturday night there was a mighty display of the convincing power of God. Those very young men, who came for sport, became much alarmed; some, throwing away their whiskey bottles, fell upon their knees in prayer, while others ran into the woods, to escape, if possible, from their fears; but even here their cries for mercy testified to the deep anguish of their souls.

This was the commencement of a great revival of religion in that part of the country, which eventuated in the conversion of about four hundred souls in Cynthiana and its vicinity, under the ministry of Absalom Hunt, Le Roy Cole, and others, who assisted them in their work.

From this the reformation afterward spread its hallowing influence in various directions through the country in that part of Kentucky. It is said that during this great and good work several traveling preachers were raised up, who have since distinguished themselves for usefulness in the Church.

Le Roy Cole, lived long, did much good, and "triumphed over death" in 1830 at nearly eighty-one years of age, having lived to see the cause, for which he so long labored and suffered, prevail over all the land. He sleeps in Kentucky.

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Part 3

JAMES O. CROMWELL

Apparently very little was ever recorded by M. E. historians about James O. Cromwell. Lednum writes: "In 1773 new appointments were made for preaching at the following places: Mr. Joseph Cromwell, a stiff old Churchman, near Baltimore, differing with his parson about predestination, was willing to receive the Methodists, and his house became a stand for preaching. Two of the Cromwell's, Joseph and James, became traveling preachers." The full name of the latter was James Oliver Cromwell, and thus it would appear that the subject of this sketch was named after the well-known figure in English history, Oliver Cromwell.

James O. Cromwell was received into the Methodist traveling ministry in America in 1780, along with: George Moore, Stephen Black, Samuel Watson, James Martin, Moses Park, William Partridge, John James, Thomas Foster, Caleb Boyer, and George Mair.

All the preachers received on trial this year continued to honor God and Methodism during life. Some of them soon ended their itinerant career; others had a longer race. Stephen Black and George Mair soon died in the Lord. The latter was no ordinary Christian preacher. William Partridge, James O. Cromwell, and Thomas Foster continued many years as lights and ornaments of Methodist Christianity. Their memory is blessed. Caleb Boyer was regarded as a great preacher in his day, and his life was untarnished to the end.

One of the Cromwells, quite possibly James O., was present at the first Quarterly Meeting in Barratt's Chapel, which is now an historic site. One M. E. Historian writes: "In March, 1780, Messrs. Philip Barratt and Waitman Sipple took the lead in erecting Barratt's Chapel. Its deed dates from May of this year. It is 42 by 48 feet, built of bricks, two stories high, and had a vestry room connected with it. It was then, and for a number of years after, far the grandest country chapel that the Methodists had in, America. By the fall of this year it, was enclosed, and had a ground floor, with rough seats and pulpit, and was occupied as a place of worship. It was not, however, finished until two generations passed away. In November of this year the first Quarterly Meeting was held in it. It was supposed that there were a thousand people in attendance. Dr. McGaw, Messrs. Asbury, Hartley, Pedicord, and Cromwell, were there to officiate."

If the following extract from Asbury's Journal speaks of James O. Cromwell -- and there is reason to believe that it does -- it illustrates the effectiveness of his preaching. The extract from Asbury's Journal is the entry for February 1, 1780:

"At nine o'clock we had a love feast, a time of great tenderness. After some time Brother Cromwell spoke, his words went through me, as they have every time I have heard him. He is the

only man I have heard in America with whose speaking I am never tired. I always admire his unaffected simplicity; he is a prodigy, a man that cannot write or read well, yet, according to what I have heard, he is much like the English John Brown, or the Irish John Smith, or Beveridge's Shepherd's Boy. I fear he will not stand or live long. The power of God attends him more or less in every place, he hardly ever opens his mouth in vain; some are generally cut to the heart, yet he himself is in the fire of temptation daily. Lord, keep him every moment!

In 1781, James O. Cromwell labored in West Jersey. In 1784, he attended the Christmas Conference, was ordained as one of the first Elders in the M. E. Church, and with Freeborn Garrettson was appointed to Nova Scotia. He accompanied the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson to Nova Scotia, in about the middle of February, 1785.

Soon after their arrival, Freeborn Garrettson received a letter from Mr. Wesley, of which the following is an extract:--

"I am glad brother Cromwell and you have undertaken that labor of love, the visiting Nova Scotia, and doubt not but you act in full concert with the little handful who were almost alone till you came. It will be the wisest way to make all those who desire to join together thoroughly acquainted with the whole Methodist plan, and to accustom them, from the very beginning, to the accurate observance of all our rules. Let none of them rest in being half Christians. Whatever they do, let them do it with their might, and it will be well, as soon as any of them find peace with God, to exhort them to go on to perfection. The more explicitly and strongly you press all believers to aspire after full sanctification as attainable now by simple faith, the more the whole work of God will prosper..."

"I am your affectionate friend and brother,
"J. Wesley."

Cromwell's labors in Nova Scotia may have been shortened by infirmity. He suffered from ill-health during his labors in Nova Scotia, and after about 2 years he returned to the United States.

In 1789, James O. Cromwell also attended the first session of another governing body of the M. E. Church. Within a few years after the Christmas Conference, Asbury and the other leaders began to see that they must devise some workable scheme by which the Connection could express its mind and judgment on living issues in such a way as to avoid the awkward and cumbersome method of voting through the yearly Conferences. It might seem strange that they did not at once convene another General Conference. Nevertheless, it was determined to create a Representative Council. In 1789 this plan was laid before the yearly Conferences by Bishop Asbury, and met with their almost unanimous approval. Later in the year the first session of the Council was convened at Cokesbury College, Abingdon, Maryland. J. O. Cromwell was a part of that Council. Below is an extract from the December 3, 1789 entry of Asbury's Journal regarding this meeting:

"Our Council was seated, consisting of the following persons, namely: Richard Ivey, from Georgia; Reuben Ellis, South Carolina; Edward Morris, North Carolina; Philip Bruce, North district of Virginia; James O'Kelly, South district of Virginia; Lemuel Green, Ohio; Nelson Reed, Western Shore of -Maryland; Joseph Everett, Eastern Shore; John Dickins, Pennsylvania; James O.

Cromwell, Jersey; and Freeborn Garrettson, New York. All our business was done in love and unanimity."

The men of the first Council were men of light and leading. If the Church had been searched throughout, their superiors could not have been found. But not one of them was chosen by the Conferences. They were members of the Council by virtue of their office. The business which Bishop Asbury says, "was done in harmony and love" seems to have related chiefly to the wants of Cokesbury College, the printing of books and tracts, and the securing of funds for the suffering preachers on the Western frontier, but this Council was destined to a short life.

James O Cromwell may have also attended the second session of the Council that met in Baltimore December 1, 1790. However, it adjourned without making any recommendations. No other session was ever convened, and thus ended its existence. A General Conference was convened in Baltimore in November, 1792, which also may have been attended by Cromwell.

In 1793 James O Cromwell located. He was alive in 1806; living on Baltimore Circuit, a "humble sweet-spirited old minister." I found no record of his death.

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Part 4 REUBEN ELLIS

In 1773, the preachers began to preach in North Carolina. Mr. Pilmoor passing through it preached a few times in the early part of this year; and Mr. Williams visited it in the latter end of the same year; and in the spring of 1774 began to form societies in it. Some of the first societies formed in this province were in Halifax county; and in this region Methodism had its greatest strength in this state while in its infancy. The Ellis family was one of the principal families among the Methodists in this state, and Reuben Ellis was one of the first traveling preachers from North Carolina. He was admitted in to the Methodist Itinerancy in 1777, about 7 years before the M. E. Church organization.

Richard Ellis' preaching was said to be "weighty and powerful," and in his life he manifested great deadness to this world, living as in the immediate view of eternity. During nearly twenty years he traversed the colonies from Pennsylvania to Georgia, "sounding the alarm" amid the din of the Revolutionary War. Between the colonies just mentioned, he also ministered in Maryland, Virginia, and in both North and South Carolina. He was a weighty and powerful preacher, and many appreciated his value in the Church. His godliness made him contented with merely food and raiment.

At the Christmas Conference of 1784 when the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized, only a few of the preachers were elected and ordained elders. There was not the slightest disposition to lay hands suddenly and indiscriminately on just anybody that might desire it. Those who were supposed to be the most competent were picked out for this distinction. Reuben Ellis was one of them -- one of the original ordained elders.

These picked men were judiciously distributed in every part of the country to which Methodism had spread, that they might be able to administer the sacraments with reasonable regularity in all the circuits.

I found little in the Methodist Episcopal Church histories about the details of Ellis' ministry. I did find some details of the part he played in the "sacramental controversy."

Along with others, Reuben Ellis advocated the administration of the sacraments to those in their flocks by Methodist ministers themselves, as opposed to sending their people to an Anglican clergyman for baptism and the Lord's Supper. Prior to the Christmas Conference, Wesley had not authorized the administration of the sacraments by American Methodist clergymen. Asbury enforced this prohibition, and as the result, at the Fluvanna Conference, in which Ellis played an important role, a temporary rift was created in the church. At the Fluvanna Conference, the legitimate conference for that year, it was decided to go ahead and authorize the administration of the sacraments by Methodist clergymen, even though Asbury opposed these measures.

The preachers who sanctioned the arrangement at the Fluvanna Conference to have the ordinances of Christianity administered among the Methodists, were Isham Tatum, Charles Hopkins, Nelson Reed, Reuben Ellis, Philip Gatch, Thomas Morris, James Morris, James Foster, John Major, Andrew Yeargan, Henry Willis, Francis Poythress, John Sigman, Leroy Cole, Carter Cole, James O'Kelly, William Moore, and Samuel Rowe.

At the time, Asbury felt that they were premature in pushing for authority to administer the sacraments. However, it would appear instead that the time was ripe to grant this authority, and had not Reuben Ellis and the others by their actions at Fluvanna pressured Asbury in this direction, who in turn related to Wesley their sentiments -- more trouble might have resulted than was caused by the Fluvanna decisions and actions. Through wise compromise and Wesley's wise move to solve the problem by organizing the M. E. Church, the breach was healed and the newly ordained American M. E. Elders were finally authorized to administer the sacraments.

In character, Reuben Ellis was said to be a man of simplicity and godly sincerity. He was a faithful friend. He sought not himself. "During twenty years of labor," wrote one, "according to my knowledge, he never laid up twenty pounds by preaching; his horse, his clothing, and immediate necessities, were all he appeared to want of the world. And although he married, in the last year of his life, he lived as on the verge of eternity, enjoying much of the presence of God.

Reuben Ellis "was a man large in body, but slender in constitution. A few years before his death he was brought to the gates of eternity, and in the Autumn before his demise he was reduced very low by affliction. He was always ready to fill any station to which he was appointed, although he might go through the fire of temptation and the waters of affliction. The people in South Carolina well knew his excellent worth as a Christian and a minister of Christ.

The last station of Reuben Ellis was in Baltimore, where in February of 1796 he died, and was there buried, leaving but few behind him that were, in every respect, his equals. At his death the Conference recorded an emphatic testimony of his worth and services. His way opened to his

everlasting rest, and he closed his eyes to see his God. It is doubtful whether at his passing there was one left in all the connection of higher, if of equal standing, piety, and usefulness.

These words of Bishop Asbury are taken from the May 1, 1796 entry of his Journal: "I was somewhat alarmed at the sudden death of Reuben Ellis, who hath been in the ministry upward of twenty years; a faithful man of God ... he was an excellent counselor, and steady yokefellow in Jesus." It would appear from these words that, beyond the time of the sacramental controversy, Asbury saw the wisdom and worth of this faithful man of God.

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Part 5

FREEBORN GARRETTSON

Freeborn Garrettson was perhaps the most noteworthy and outstanding preacher among the First M. E. Elders. The HDM Digital Library now contains two biographies of him: (1) hdm0013.tex -- "The Life of Freeborn Garrettson by Nathan Bangs;" (2) hdm0168.tex -- "Freeborn Garrettson" by Ezra Squier Tipple. In addition, numerous portions of text are to be found about Garrettson's life and ministry in other publications of our Library, particularly in the histories of Nathan Bangs, John Lednum, and Abel Stevens.

Readers of this file are encouraged to read both of the above mentioned biographies of Freeborn Garrettson. The story of his life is both interesting and inspiring -- well worth the time invested to read it. After his dramatic conversion came the time when he was also sanctified wholly, and his exploits for God were mighty. If you have not already read his life story, if possible, why not do so soon? The Garrettson biography by Nathan Bangs is especially recommended.

Thus, while the sketch of Freeborn Garrettson in this compilation would otherwise merit as much or more space as that given to others of the First M. E. Elders, because our Library contains the aforesaid Garrettson writings, there is presented below only a brief sketch of Freeborn Garrettson. Beneath it, there is likewise a brief sketch of his wife. These are taken from the Cyclopedia of Methodism "Character Sketches" by Matthew Simpson.

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Freeborn Garrettson was a pioneer minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church and was born August 15, 1750 in Maryland. He was converted in 1775, in the twenty-third year of his age, and in the same year united with the Conference. In 1784, at the Christmas Conference, he was ordained elder by Dr. Coke, and in the same year volunteered as a missionary to Nova Scotia, where he remained about three years laboring with great success, leaving about 600 members in connection with the Methodist societies. In 1788 he was appointed a presiding elder to extend the borders of the church up the Hudson. He was assisted in this work by twelve young preachers. His labors extended as far as Lake Champlain, and into Eastern New York, Western Connecticut, and Vermont. Besides these places, he traveled extensively throughout the States of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey.

Freeborn Garrettson was severely persecuted during the Revolutionary War and his life frequently threatened. He was superannuated in 1818. He died in New York City, Sept. 26, 1827, in the seventy-sixth year of his age, and in the fifty-second year of his itinerant ministry. In his will he made provision for the annual support of a single preacher as a missionary, to be appointed by the New York Conference. He was one of the most efficient and laborious evangelists of his age, and died lamented and honored by all the people.

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Mrs. Catharine Garrettson, wife of Freeborn Garrettson, was born Oct. 14, 1752. She was the daughter of Judge Robert R. Livingston, who had inherited a large estate in the Livingston Manor, on the Hudson River. Her mother was the daughter of Colonel Beckman, a descendant of William Beckman, who was governor of what is now the State of Delaware under a commission from Sweden. Her brother, Robert Livingston, was one of the committee who formed the Declaration of Independence, and was first chancellor of the State of New York, and administered the oath to George Washington when he was first inaugurated as President. He was also Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Minister to France. Another brother, Edward Livingston, was senator from Louisiana, Secretary of State, and Minister to France. Catharine (Livingston) Garrettson had six sisters, women of more than ordinary talent, three of whom married generals famous in the history of their country. Their house was a center of deep patriotic interest, where public movements were noted and discussed, and no small sacrifices were made.

Catharine Livingston became deeply serious, and on one Sabbath at the communion experienced the sense of her acceptance with God. In his journeys through New York, Rev. Freeborn Garrettson came to Poughkeepsie, and was invited to preach at Rhinebeck. He was invited to make his home at Mr. Tillotson's, whose wife was a sister of Miss Livingston. Shortly afterwards a class was formed which she joined, and in 1793 she was married to Freeborn Garrettson.

Six years after her marriage a place was purchased on the Hudson and a house built, in which she resided until her death. Catharine Garrettson wrote in October, 1799, of the new house, "We moved into it, and the first night in family prayer, while my blessed husband was dedicating it to the Lord, the place was filled with His presence, who in the days of old filled the temple with his glory."

Mrs. Garrettson was remarkable for her good judgment and for her sense of propriety. She was deeply pious and spent much time in prayer. She was universally respected, and her counsels and admonitions were listened to and valued even by the light-hearted and thoughtless. In 1827 her husband died of sudden illness in New York, but in glorious triumph. Catharine Garrettson remained twenty-two years longer, and at ninety-seven, when visited by her only surviving brother, was seized with sudden illness. Before she became unconscious she cried out, with uplifted eyes and hands, "Come, Lord Jesus, come; Lord Jesus, come quickly," and then in holy triumph, clapping her hands, she exclaimed, "He comes! He comes! He comes!" and passed away.

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Part 6
WILLIAM GILL

William Gill was the bosom friend of John Tunnell, and one of the most eminent itinerants of his times; yet, like his heroic friend, is hardly known in our day. He was a native of Delaware, and the first Methodist traveling preacher raised up in that state; a man of superior intellect and acquisitions, which so impressed Dr. Rush, who attended him during a period of sickness in Philadelphia, as to dispose that great man ever afterward to defend the Methodist ministry against the prevalent imputations of ignorance and fanaticism. Rush pronounced him "the greatest divine he had ever heard."

Jesse Lee, the first historian of Methodism says: "From the long acquaintance I had with Mr. Gill, I am led to conclude that we had scarcely a preacher left to equal him in either knowledge or goodness. Indeed, I knew none who had such a depth of knowledge, both of men and things, as he possessed. Both his conversation and preaching were entertaining, and with much wisdom."

William Gill was ordained an elder at the "Christmas Conference" of 1784 when the M. E. Church was organized, "standing among the foremost." He was esteemed the most profound, the most philosophic mind in the Methodist ministry of his day. He labored in Maryland, Virginia, New Jersey, and Delaware, successively, occupying important appointments, and for some years in the office of "Presiding Elder," as it was afterward called.

William Gill's last field was on Kent circuit, Maryland, in 1788, where he died declaring "all is well," and closed his eyes with his own hands as he expired. He was buried at the oldest Methodist chapel in Kent County. The Minutes of 1789, noticing his death, say "William Gill, a native of Delaware; an elder in the Church and a laborer in it for about twelve years; blameless in life ... sound in the faith, clear in his judgment, meek in his spirit, resigned and solemnly happy in his death."

One of his contemporaries remarks: "Jonathan and David were not more ardently attached to each other than were Tunnell and Gill. William Gill was preeminently astute and philosophic. John Tunnell was an Apollos. What raptures must they have felt at meeting in their Father's house above! Few purer spirits, I verily believe, ever inhabited tenements of clay." He suffered from the usual poverty of the itinerancy. Asbury says, "I feel for those who have had to groan out a wretched life, dependent on others -- as Pedicord, Gill, Tunnell, and others whose names I do not now recollect; but their names are written in the book of life, and their souls are in the glory of God."

"Even," adds another authority, "a gravestone, with an inscription sufficient to designate his resting place, was denied him. A person who visited his grave writes: 'He died in Chestertown, Kent County, Md.; and, when a few more of the older men of this generation pass away, the probability is no one will know the place of his sepulcher, as I was unsuccessful in endeavoring to persuade the Methodists there to erect at his grave only a plain head and foot stone; but his record is on high.'"

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Part 7

JOHN HAGGERTY

John Haggerty was of commanding person, robust, energetic, with prominent features, and a noble, intellectual forehead. He was in all respects a worthy representative of the original ministry of American Methodism. He was one of the original Elders ordained at the Christmas Conference of 1784. He was born in Prince George County, Maryland, in 1747, and was brought to enjoy experimental communion with heaven, under the preaching of John King, about 1770, or 1771.

In 1772 King lodged at his house, preached in the market place, and formed a class, consisting of Haggerty and thirteen others. John Haggerty was made the leader of the class, and he began to preach, among his neighbors, the same year, and continued to labor diligently for the Church, under the direction of Strawbridge, Rankin, and King, till he entered the regular itinerancy in 1779.

It is probable that John Haggerty was a native of Frederick County, Maryland; and it seems he belonged to the original society at Pipe Creek. If he was not of German descent, he was raised among them, and could preach in both English and German. He was instrumental of the conversion of not a few men of ability, who became ornaments of the ministry.

Thomas Morrell had been an army officer in the Revolutionary War. In 1783, the year in which the war ended, and the independence of the United States was acknowledged, Morrell was brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God, through the instrumentality of John Haggerty.

Notwithstanding the piety of his Methodist mother, Thomas Morrell had continued unconverted till about his thirty-eighth year, when John Haggerty entered Elizabethtown, New Jersey, and, inquiring for a lodging place, was directed to the home of the Morrells as the only one in which a Methodist might find a welcome, for no society had yet been formed in the town by the denomination.

Morrell had heard his mother relate wonders of the early struggles and successes of her people in New York, and listened with eager interest to the sermon of Haggerty under his own father's roof, from the text, "God so loved the world," etc. He was awakened under it, and after a few months was converted.

The foundation of Methodism in Elizabeth New Jersey was laid at that time, and it continued to prosper there notwithstanding formidable obstacles. John Haggerty was the first Methodist preacher Morrell ever heard. At Haggerty's earnest solicitation, about three months after his conversion, the Morrell abandoned a lucrative business, and commenced preaching in different places, his appointments being made by Haggerty as he passed round the circuit. Thus he was led forth by Haggerty into the ministry, which he afterward adorned.

John Haggerty's appointments extended from Annapolis to New York. Few men were more cordially disposed to serve the Church. At any hour, night or day, he was at the command of the people. Distance, weather, or season was no consideration with him when duty called. He was often known to rise from his bed at midnight and ride, for miles, into the country, to visit the sick or dying, without fee or reward.

After fifteen years in the itinerancy, at the close of 1792 he was compelled to locate by the sickness of his wife. He settled in Baltimore, where he continued to preach with great acceptability. He died in Baltimore in 1823, at the age of seventy-six.

"We called," writes Bishop Soule, "to see him on the preceding Sunday, and found him in a very comfortable frame of mind. Upon remarking to him that he appeared to be drawing nigh to eternity, he replied, 'Yes and all is straight; the way is clear before me.' In the afternoon we called again, and prayed with him. He now appeared to have heaven in full anticipation. His eyes sparkled, and his whole theme was thanksgiving and praise. On Thursday evening, September 4th, he breathed his last without a struggle or a groan."

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Part 8 RICHARD IVEY

Mr. Richard Ivey was a traveling preacher of distinction in the beginning of Methodism. He was a native of Sussex county, Virginia.

The sixth Annual Conference met at Leesburg, Va., May 19, 1778. All the English preachers, save Asbury, had returned, and he was in seclusion at Judge White's in Delaware. The Conference was presided over by William Watters, the oldest native itinerant. He was not yet twenty-seven years of age. Nine preachers were admitted on trial: Richard Ivey, Robert Cloud, Richard Ogburn, Daniel Duvall, John Beck, William Moore, James O'Kelly, John Major, and Henry Willis. Ivey began to itinerate this same the year.

In 1782, when Richard Ivey was preaching in West Jersey, a company of American soldiers with their officers came to one of his appointments to arrest him. Of this incident Thomas Ware wrote:

"Learning that a company of soldiers, quartered near one of the appointments, had resolved to arrest the first preacher who should come there, and carry him to headquarters, I determined to accompany him, hoping, as I was acquainted with some of the officers, to convince them that he was no enemy of his country. The preacher was Richard Ivey, who, at that time, was quite young. The rumor of what was about to be done having gone abroad, many of the most respectable inhabitants of the neighborhood were collected at the place. Soon after the congregation was convened a file of soldiers were marched into the yard, and halted near the door, and two officers came in, drew their swords, crossed them on the table, and seated themselves, one on each side of

it, but so as to look the preacher full in the face. I watched his eye with great anxiety, and soon saw that he was not influenced by fear.

"His text was, 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' When he came to enforce the exhortation, 'Fear not,' he paused, and said, 'Christians sometimes fear when there is no cause for fear;' and so, he added, he presumed it was with some then present. Those men who were engaged in the defense of their country's right meant them no harm. He spoke fluently and forcibly in commendation of the cause of freedom from foreign and domestic tyranny, looking at the same time first on the swords, and then in the faces of the officers, as if he would say, This looks a little too much like domestic oppression; and in conclusion, bowing to each of the officers, and opening his bosom, said, 'Sirs, I would fain show you my heart; if it beats not high for legitimate liberty may it forever cease to beat.' This he said with such a tone of voice and with such a look as thrilled the whole audience, and gave him command of their feelings.

"The countenances of the officers at first wore a contemptuous frown, then a significant smile, and then they were completely unarmed: they hung down their hands, and before the conclusion of this masterly address, shook like the leaves of an aspen. Many of the people sobbed aloud, and others cried out, Amen! while the soldiers without (the doors and windows being open) swung their hats, and shouted, 'Huzza for the Methodist parson!' On leaving, the officers shook hands with the preacher, and wished him well; and afterward said they would share their last shilling with him."

When the Church was organized at the Christmas Conference of 1784, Richard Ivey was ordained as one of the original Elders. Besides Ivey, others ordained as Elders at this historic Conference were: Freeborn Garrettson, James O. Cromwell, Jeremiah Lambert, John Tunnell, William Gill, Le Roy Cole, Nelson Reed, John Haggerty, Reuben Ellis, Henry Willis, James O'Kelly, and Beverly Allen. Those made deacons at the Christmas Conference were: John Dickins, Ignatius Pigman, and Caleb Boyer. Dickins was ordained at the Conference; Pigman and Boyer were ordained the following June.

As a Presiding Elder, Ivey was a part of a short-lived Council favored by Asbury: "The Proceedings of the Bishop and Presiding Elders of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in Council assembled, at Baltimore, on the first day of December, 1789." "The following members which formed the Council were present: Francis Asbury, Bishop, Richard Ivey, Reuben Ellis, Edward Morris, James O'Kelly, Philip Bruce, Lemuel Green, Nelson Reed, Joseph Everett, John Dickins, James O. Cromwell, Freeborn Garrettson." An examination of the minutes of this year shows that these were all the Presiding Elders, except John Tunnell, who was absent, probably on account of ill-health, as he was consumptive ..."

However, according to the following quotation from Drinkhouse, even though as a Presiding Elder Ivey was a part of the ill-fated Council, he opposed this form of governing body and favored instead the General Conference: "The third Council had been nominated for December, 1792, but, as already found, it never assembled. Under the lead of such influential preachers as O'Kelly, Jesse Lee, Richard Ivey, Bruce, Garrettson, Haggard, Hull, McKendree, then a young man of high promise and vigorous intellect, and a number of others, the agitation

against the Council and for a General Conference went on with increasing fervor and widening scope."

Richard Ivey was apparently one of those who favored a more democratic form of church government. James O'Kelly put forth a proposition to so abridge the episcopal prerogative that, "after the bishop appoints the preachers, at conference, to their several circuits, if any one thinks himself injured by the appointment he shall have liberty to appeal to the conference and state his objections; and if the conference approve his objections, the bishop shall appoint him to another circuit." Ivey was among those who supported this measure. During the debate, he "exceeded himself; he spake with tears, and in the fear of God, and much to the purpose ..."

After this amendment failed James O'Kelly left the Methodists and his name fell into a degree of ignominy and reproach in their sight of some. However dishonorable some of O'Kelly's actions might have been, the fact is that there were a number of early American Methodists who wanted their church to follow the lead of their nation by doing away with some of the autocratic rule in American Methodism, and by bringing in a more democratic form of church government. On the first appearance of the question, in addition to Ivey, such men as Garrettson, Ware, Hull, and Reed sustained O'Kelly's proposed amendment. Thus, in espousing some of the positions of O'Kelly, Ivey was not voicing the views of only of a man who was branded as a schismatic.

It should not be forgotten, also, that at this very time had commenced those debates in the British Conference, occasioned by the death of Wesley, which resulted in the reorganization of Wesleyan Methodism, with precisely the "appeal," advocated by O'Kelly, recognized as a constitutional right of every itinerant preacher. However, unlike the divisive James O'Kelly, Richard Ivey stayed with the M. E. Church until his death.

Richard Ivey preached with a good degree of animation, and as an Itinerant he traveled about 18 years. During much of this time he served as a Presiding Elder and he became known from New Jersey to Georgia. In 1782, Dudley and Ivey traveled West Jersey. One one occasion Ivey worked with Benjamin Abbott at a quarterly meeting held in the barn of a Mr. Simmons. Many attended this meeting, and Abbott wrote concerning it: "On Sabbath I preached, and the Lord attended the word with power; many cried aloud, and some fell to the floor. Brother Ivey gave a powerful exhortation, which made many weep. A number were converted, and some professed sanctification."

Richard Ivey was a holy, self-denying Christian that lived to be useful. He sought not himself any more than a Pedicord, a Gill, or a Tunnell, men well known to our connection, who never thought of growing rich by the Gospel; whose great concern was to be rich in grace and useful to souls. Thus Ivey, a man of affliction, lingered out his latter days, spending his all with his life in the work. Exclusive of his patrimony, he was indebted at his death. He located in 1794, and returned to his native place in Virginia to take care of his aged mother. He was making some preparation to settle himself, when he was taken sick, and died in peace the latter part of the year 1795.

Richard Ivey stood High as a Christian and as a preacher. It is an example of the capriciousness of fortune or fame, that while the name of James O'Kelly is familiar in Methodist history, that of Richard Ivey, an incomparably more deserving man, is hardly remembered.

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Part 9

JEREMIAH LAMBERT

Jeremiah Lambert was a native of New Jersey, and he was one of the earliest and best preachers contributed to the itinerancy by New Jersey. He was received into the traveling ministry in 1781, and at the organization of the Church in 1784 he was ordained an elder for the Island of Antigua.

Apparently very few of the details of his life and ministry were left on records available to the Early M. E. Historians.

Thomas Ware, also of New Jersey, knew Jeremiah Lambert well, and alluded to him as "the dove-like Lambert." Elsewhere, referring to Lambert's four years in the traveling ministry prior the Christmas Conference, Ware said:

"He had in four years, without the parade of Classical learning, or any theological training, literally attained to an eminence in the pulpit which no ordinary man could reach by the aid of any human means whatever. He was most emphatically a primitive Methodist preacher, preaching out of the pulpit as well as in it. The graces with which he was eminently adorned were intelligence, innocence, and love. These imparted a glow of eloquence to all he said and did."

As early as 1783, Jeremiah Lambert is recorded in the Minutes as appointed to the Holston country -- the first Methodist preacher designated to the ultramontane part of the continent. After the Christmas Conference of 1784, he went to the Island of Antigua, but after spending some time there and feeling himself beginning to decline, he returned to his homeland, where he died in 1786.

In recording Jeremiah Lambert's death, the 1786 Conference pronounced him "an elder six years in the work; a man of sound judgment, clear understanding, good gifts, genuine piety, and very useful, humble, and holy; diligent in life, and resigned in death; much esteemed in the connection, and justly lamented in his death. We do not sorrow as men without hope, but expect shortly to join him and all those who rest from their labors."

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Part 10

JAMES O'KELLY

James O'Kelly became one of the most controversial figures in Methodist history. I found only a few facts about his birth and early life:-- He was born in Virginia in about 1757. His father was Irish. "He had the best educational advantages the country then afforded, being a school chum

with Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry." O'Kelly commenced his ministerial work in the middle of the Revolutionary War, and was received into the Methodist traveling ministry in 1778.

James O'Kelly and Francis Asbury became acquainted first in 1780. O'Kelly was then a warmhearted Christian, and a zealous preacher. He would rise at midnight and pour out his soul in prayer, crying, "Give me children, or I die." For several years he filled high stations in the Church, acting as elder at the head of a district, and he was useful and had much influence.

He was ordained as an M. E. elder at the organization of the Church in 1784, and was a member of the first Council, that met in 1789. In 1790 he addressed a letter to Bishop Asbury, complaining of his power, and bidding him halt in his episcopal career for one year, or he would have to use his influence against him. In 1792, at the first General Conference, James O'Kelly moved a resolution, "That if any preacher felt himself aggrieved or oppressed by the appointment made by the bishop, he should have the privilege of appealing to the Conference, which should consider and finally determine the matter." This resolution was lost, whereupon he withdrew from the M. E. Church and formed a connection that was called "Republican Methodists." It is stated that O'Kelly "withdrew 1793," which would indicate that his official withdrawal from the M. E. Church was somewhat later than his departure from the General Conference of 1792.

This was the first secession from the Methodist Episcopal Church. In the Southern District of Virginia, O'Kelly had considerable influence, and here he and his followers produced much confusion among the Methodists. The minutes show from 1792 to 1798 a declension of about 8000 members in the M. E. Church, most of which may have been attributable to O'Kelly's secession and efforts to raise up a following. However, Lednum wrote concerning this movement that it "never spread very far over the country; and, at this day, they are known only in history."

Of the preachers that were influenced by Mr. O'Kelly's views of church government, and the power that a Methodist Bishop should have, William McKendree was one, who sent his resignation in writing to Asbury in 1792. But, as the District Conference agreed to let the displeased preachers continue to preach among the Methodists, provided they were quiet, and would not excite division, McKendree soon became reconciled with Bishop Asbury and sixteen years after this was elected and ordained the first American-born Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

O'Kelly issued a pamphlet giving his reasons for protesting against the Methodist Episcopal Church. This was replied to by Nicholas Snethen, and it was followed by an additional pamphlet on each side. O'Kelly ordained such preachers as came to him, but was disappointed in the number of proselytes, being far below his expectations. In 1801 he changed the name of the church to the Christian Church, and divisions and subdivisions followed, until in twenty years from its commencement there remained but little of the organization.

The split between James O'Kelly and Bishop Asbury, and all of the controversy surrounding his secession from the M. E. Church to begin building a new denomination that failed, are parts of a sad story. I forbear bringing into this sketch all of the many details that the reader can call up from the various M. E. histories and biographies on this subject. Huge amounts of text can be found related to it in the HDM Digital Library. E. J. Drinkhouse in his History of Methodist

Reform presents O'Kelly in a much more favorable light, and it is in his history that perhaps the most can be found on the subject. Bangs, Stevens, Lednum, Tipple, and nearly all others whose writings are now in our Library, cast O'Kelly in a much more negative light.

Apparently, those who favored democratic reforms in the M. E. Church were those who viewed O'Kelly and his proposals more positively, and those who were more content with the status quo of the episcopacy were more prone to condemn James O'Kelly and his movement. Interestingly, Nicholas Snethen condemned O'Kelly's actions at that time but later himself became an outspoken advocate of democratic reform within the M. E. Church.

Perhaps the whole controversy could have been avoided by some compromises on the part of James O'Kelly and Bishop Asbury. Both, however, were dominant personalities, and for whatever reasons the sad division occurred. Asbury, on his part, was content that he had done right. While the controversy was still storming, he wrote: "Mr. O'Kelly hath now published to the world what he hath been telling to his disciples for years. Mr. Hammett was moderate; Glendenning not very severe; but James [O'Kelly] hath turned the butt-end of his whip and is unanswerably abusive: the Lord judge between us! And he certainly will in that day of days."

Asbury was sometimes inclined to pass rather severe judgment on those who opposed his leadership. After Robert Strawbridge departed the earthly scene, Asbury recorded in his Journal the opinion that God had taken him out of the way. Like O'Kelly, Strawbridge was another strong personality who was not inclined to yield ground to Asbury, but other records of the death of Robert Strawbridge cast no such shadow upon his demise as that recorded by Asbury. Strawbridge had been wonderfully used of God in the early days of Methodism in America, long before the arrival of Francis Asbury, and apart from Asbury's remarks, there seems to be no good reason to believe that Strawbridge did not die triumphantly in the faith.

Perhaps also, James O'Kelly was perceived by Asbury and others too negatively. However, to Asbury's credit, in 1802, ten years after the O'Kelly secession, Bishop Asbury went out of his way to arrange his last interview with his old opponent in Winchester, Virginia. They met in peace, talked of things indifferently, said nothing of their personal antagonisms, asked of each other's welfare, prayed together, and parted in peace. Perhaps beyond the veil, where all human misunderstanding will be forever done away, they shall again meet in peace where they shall see perfectly, "eye to eye" forevermore.

James O'Kelly survived till October 16, 1826, and died in his ninety-second year. Dr. Leroy M. Lee says: "He retained to the latest period of his life unabated confidence in the purity and power of his system. In age and feebleness his hope in the work of his hands did not desert him. He went down to the grave, according to one of his followers, satisfied with the past and peaceful and hopeful with respect to the future."

According to an item in the Drinkhouse history which seemed to refer to a church in O'Kelly's group, we find this concerning his burial: "O'Kelly is buried in the cemetery attached to the Raleigh, N. C., church, and his grave [is] designated with a marble monument."

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Part 11
NELSON REED

Nelson Reed was born in Anne Arundel County, Maryland on Nov. 27, 1751. He was small of stature but mighty in spirit. In 1775, he was awakened during a great revival in Fairfax circuit and converted under the ministry of William Watters, the first American-born Circuit-Rider.

Reed began his labors as a local preacher the same year, and continued them with ardor and success, till admitted, in 1779, to the itinerant ranks. He was at the Christmas Conference, and assisted in organizing the Methodists into a Church, at which time he was ordained an Elder. For ten years following this historic Conference, Nelson Reed had charge of districts in Maryland and Virginia, and filled the most prominent appointments in the cities, or presided over districts.

Nelson Reed was a man of transparent purity, solid talents, unswerving firmness, and rare symmetry of both mental and moral character. One of his personal friends, himself a veteran in the itinerancy, says:

"There was no man to whom I would sooner go, as a counselor in time of difficulty, than to Nelson Reed. I can truly say that I have rarely known a brother toward whom my heart has been more strongly attracted; and now, after he has been resting for many years in his grave, his many admirable qualities come before me in most grateful remembrance, and his very name touches one of the tenderest chords in my heart.

"He was of low stature, not more than five feet eight or nine inches high, strongly built, and uncommonly lithe and active in all his movements; a decidedly fine looking man. His mind was of a very marked cast, possessing at once great force and great compass. His perceptions were quick and clear, his judgment discriminating, and his ability to arrange and combine with the best effect very uncommon.

"While He could not be charged with anything like impulsiveness or impetuosity, he had a strength of conviction, a tenacity of purpose, that nothing could overawe, and that generally formed a perfect security for the accomplishment of his ends. He moved forward like a pillar of light and of strength, until, by fair, well-considered, and honorable means, you saw that he had attained the object at which He was aiming.

"I hardly need say that these qualities gave him a preeminence in the General Conference, as well as in all the other councils of the Church. Nelson Reed commanded great attention as a preacher. He had a strong, round, full but not very melodious voice; and I presume He never found himself in any audience where it was not easy for him to make himself heard to the extreme limit. His sermons were generally argumentative, and thoroughly wrought, and seemed to require not much of passion in the delivery. He was deeply versed in the science of theology, having given to it a large amount of study, and from his rich stores of Biblical and theological knowledge he drew largely in every sermon that He preached.

"He used to be called by a homely nickname, which, however, in that part of the country indicated the high estimation in which He was held; it was nothing more nor less than the 'bacon and cabbage preacher,' by which it was intended to be understood that his preaching was of the most substantial and nourishing character.

"I remember to have heard of an incident in the earlier history of Mr. Reed, I think it was in the year 1796, that may serve to illustrate his remarkable fearlessness and energy. It occurred in the Conference which was then holding its session in Baltimore. Dr. Coke, one of the superintendents of the Church, was present; and one of the striking features of his character was that He was impatient of contradiction, and not wholly insensible to his own personal importance.

"He had on this occasion introduced some proposition in the General Conference, which seemed to some of the preachers a little dictatorial; and one of them, an Irishman, by the name of Matthews, who had been converted in his native country from Romanism, and had fled to this country from an apprehension that his life was in danger at home, sprang to his feet, and cried out, 'Popery, Popery, Popery!'

"Dr. Coke rebuked the impulsive rudeness of Matthews, when he [Matthews] replied in his Irish manner, 'Och,' and sat down.

"While the Conference was now in a state of great suspense and agitation, Dr. Coke seized the paper containing his own resolution, and, tearing it up, not in the most moderate manner, looked round upon the preachers, and said, 'Do you think yourselves equal to me?'

"Nelson Reed instantly rose, and turning to Bishop Asbury, who was also present, said, 'Dr. Coke has asked whether we think ourselves equal to him; I answer, yes, we do think ourselves equal to him, notwithstanding he was educated at Oxford, and has been honored with the degree of Doctor of Laws; and more than that, we think ourselves equal to Dr. Coke's king.'

"The doctor now rose, with his passion entirely cooled off, and said, very blandly, 'He is hard upon me.'

"Bishop Asbury replied, 'I told you that our preachers are not blockheads.'

"The doctor then asked pardon of the Conference for his abrupt and impulsive demonstration, and thus the matter ended."

During forty-five years, as a faithful evangelist, Nelson Reed served in the traveling ministry, often occupying important positions, and always commanding the public veneration by his effective talents and his unblemished life. In 1820 when he became supernumerary, he still preached as his strength allowed him. His whole ministerial course composed sixty-five years. He died in 1840, at Baltimore, in the eighty ninth year of his age, revered by the denomination as its most venerable patriarch, having attained the distinction of being at that time the oldest Methodist preacher in the world.

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Part 12
JOHN TUNNELL

John Tunnell was received on probation at the Conference of 1777; a name fragrant to the Methodists of that early day, though familiar to few of our times. "He was truly an apostolic man; his heavenly-mindedness seemed to shine on his face, and made him appear more like an inhabitant of heaven than of earth."

He was appointed one of the original Elders at the Christmas Conference organization of the Church in 1784, though he was not at the memorable Christmas Conference. He had gone in quest of health to the West India Island of St. Christopher's, where he was offered a good salary, a house, and a slave to wait upon him, if he would remain as a pastor; but he declined the offer, and returning, was ordained, and resumed his travels in the states with great success.

"His gifts as a preacher," says Lee, "were great." He was sent in 1777 to the famous Brunswick circuit, Va., where he labored with much usefulness; the next year he traveled Baltimore circuit. After several years of indefatigable labors in the middle states, he was sent, by the Conference in 1787, with four itinerants, among whom was young Thomas Ware, beyond the mountains, to the "Holston country, now called East Tennessee." He thus scaled the Alleghenies, and, though comparatively forgotten by us, takes historical rank among the founders of Methodism in the great valley of the West, its most important arena.

A sailor was one day passing where Tunnell was preaching. He stopped to listen, and was observed to be much affected; and on meeting with his companions after he left, he said, 'I have been listening to a man who has been dead, and in heaven; but he has returned, and is telling the people all about that world.' And he declared to them he had never been so much affected by anything he had ever seen or heard before. True it was, that Tunnell's appearance very much resembled that of a dead man; and when, with his strong musical voice, he poured forth a flood of heavenly eloquence, as he frequently did, he appeared indeed as a messenger from the invisible world.

His last appointment was in this frontier, (1789,) where he fell at the head of a little corps of seven itinerants, who were on four circuits, after thirteen years of faithful services, a victim of consumption -- a constitutional tendency developed by his exposures and fatigues.

Of Tunnell one said, that "he was a man of slender habit, who, early in life, wore himself out in the work of God, and went home to glory. He was a preacher much beloved and greatly blessed. A sweet singer in Israel, he had a soft, clear voice; and his demeanor was humble, meek, and gentle. He was a son of consolation and of affliction."

The sister of Patrick Henry, wife of General Russell, was saved after hearing a message by John Tunnell. On the occasion he preached an excellent sermon, which produced great effect. His discourse was followed by a number of powerful exhortations. When the meeting closed, Mrs. Russell [Patrick Henry's sister] said to one who was there: 'I thought I was a Christian; but, sir, I

am not a Christian --I am the veriest sinner upon earth. I want you and Mr. Mastin to come with Mr. Tunnell to our house and pray for us, and tell us what we must do to be saved.'

After spending the afternoon in prayer, still neither of the Russells had gotten through. One of the company wrote:

"Being much exhausted, the preachers retired to a pleasant grove, near at hand, to spend a short time. On returning to the house we found Mrs. Russell praising the Lord, and the general walking the floor and weeping bitterly. At length she sat down, quite exhausted. This scene was in a high degree interesting to us. To see the old soldier and statesman, the proud opposer of godliness, trembling, and earnestly inquiring what he must do to be saved, was an affecting sight. But the work ended not here. The conversion of Mrs. Russell, whose zeal, good sense, and amiableness of character were proverbial, together with the penitential grief so conspicuous in the general, made a deep impression on the minds of many, and numbers were brought in before the Conference closed. The general rested not until he knew his adoption; and he continued a faithful and an official member of the Church, constantly adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour unto the end of his life." No name is recorded, in the biographies of the pioneer itinerants among these mountains, with more grateful affection than that of General Russell. His house was long their asylum, and Asbury always entered it with delight."

John Tunnell died near "Sweet Springs," in July, 1790. His brethren bore his remains over the mountains, about five miles east of the Sweet Springs. Asbury preached his funeral sermon at Dew's Chapel, and interred him there, among the hills of Western Virginia, where he sleeps without a memorial; but his name will live forever in "the record on high," if not on earth. The Minutes of 1790 record in three sentences his obituary, and testify that he was "a man of solid piety, great simplicity, and godly sincerity; well known and much esteemed by ministers and people."

He had traveled extensively through the states, and "declined in much peace." Lee say, "he was greatly lamented." "In the Conference of 1787," says Thomas Ware, "I volunteered, with two other young men, who esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than earthly treasures, to accompany Tunnell to the Holston country"-- words, though brief, yet pregnant with volumes of history. Tunnell was one of the most eloquent preachers of that age; and, though bearing about with him the infirmities of incurable pulmonary disease, he traveled and labored without faltering till smitten down by death, and the hardships of the frontier fields.

Alas! that our imperfect records admit of so slight a commemoration of such saintly heroism. Asbury, in laying him in the grave, wrote: "I preached is funeral sermon; my text, 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.' We were much blessed, and the power of God was eminently present. It is fourteen years since Brother Tunnell first knew the Lord; and he has spoken about thirteen years, and traveled through eight of the thirteen states; few men, as public ministers, were better known or more beloved. He was a simple-hearted, childlike man; of good learning for his opportunities; he had a large fund of Scripture knowledge, was a good historian, a sensible preacher, a most affectionate friend, and a great saint. He had been declining, in strength and health, for eight years, and, for the last twelve months, sinking into a consumption. I am humbled. O let my soul be admonished to be more devoted to God!"

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Part 13

HENRY WILLIS

Henry Willis is another, now obscure, but once pre-eminent name, that history should not willingly let die. Willis was the most endeared to Asbury of all the itinerants of that day. He was born on the old Brunswick Circuit, Va., and was the first man that Asbury ordained deacon and elder after the Christmas Conference, having been elected to these offices at the Conference, at which he was not present.

Quinn, who knew Henry Willis in the Redstone country, describes him as about "six feet in stature," "slender," a "good English scholar," "well read," "an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures, and a most profound and powerful reasoner."

Bangs wrote of him: "Henry Willis was a 'burning and a shining light.' He was naturally of a strong mind, and this he diligently improved by an assiduous application to reading and observation. Systematic in all his movements, zealous in whatever he undertook to do, and uniform in his obedience to the commands of God, he accomplished much in a short time, and with comparatively slender means. In the various relations he sustained, whether as a son, a husband, a father, or a minister of Jesus Christ, he exemplified the duties originating from them, thus giving evidence that real religion has its appropriate duties, and that all could be discharged without interfering one with another. He was everywhere received as a messenger of God, and was long remembered by those who sat under his ministry, with most affectionate veneration, as having been an instrument of lasting benefit to their souls. "

In their Minutes, His brethren say, "that he was a man of very improved mind;" that "with him system, spirit, and practice were all united." They describe him as having "an open, pleasant, smiling countenance; great fortitude, great courage tempered with good conduct; as "cheerful, without levity, and sober, without sadness." They speak of him as a great man of God, who extended his labors from New York, in the North, to Charleston, in the South, and to the Western waters. In these stations the name of Willis will be held in venerable remembrance.

Henry Willis was first received in the Itinerancy in 1779, when there were only thirty-four preachers in the connection. He was appointed to Holston in 1784. He was the first preacher stationed in Charleston, South Carolina, and was probably the first who had an effective appointment in the Holston mountains. Sinking under pulmonary consumption, he nevertheless persisted in his travels through years of suffering, and was one of the most dominant spirits of the times, energizing by his irrepressible ardor the work of the Church throughout two thirds of its territory. He labored mightily for the West, as if conscious of its prospective importance in the State and the Church. In 1785 he had charge as presiding elder of a district which, comprehending much of North Carolina, reached far into the Holston country. In 1786 he was in Charleston, South Carolina; in 1787 in New York city; 1788, presiding elder of New York district; 1789, of a district which extended from Philadelphia to Redstone and Pittsburgh, bringing him again prominently into the trans-Allegheny field; in 1790 he located, but hardly abated his labors; the

next three years he was again in the effective ranks in Philadelphia, with John Dickins. He was compelled to locate again. In 1796 he reappears in Baltimore with John Haggerty, Nelson Reed, and other worthies; here he seems to have remained till 1800, when he became a supernumerary, doing what service he could, mostly on the Frederick circuit, near his home.

After years of apostolic labors his lungs failed, but he had such an estimate of the ministerial vocation, that he deemed it his duty never to abandon his post till death should cancel his commission. Repeatedly did he temporarily locate to regain his health, but as repeatedly did he resume his work as he had strength. "Possibly," say the Minutes, "not many such cases as that of Henry Willis have been known. He lingered along the shores of death, apparently dying, and then reviving and re-reviving for years, but finally the feeble taper sunk quietly in the socket and disappeared.

Near Strawbridge's old church, on Pipe Creek, He died in 1808 with an unshaken confidence in his God, and triumphant faith in Christ Jesus as his Saviour. Asbury esteemed no Methodist preacher higher than Henry Willis. On visiting his grave he exclaimed, "Henry Willis! Ah, when shall I look upon thy like again! Rest, man of God!" Perhaps the real worth of a Willis, and many others of the primitive Methodist preachers in America, will never be known till the great day of universal judgment."

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THE END