

TH
M 381

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CIRCUIT RIDER
TO
AMERICAN METHODISM

By
FLOYD LOEL MASON
A.B., Greenville College

A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF SACRED THEOLOGY
in
The Biblical Seminary of New York

New York, N. Y.
March 19, 1947

BIBLICAL SCHOOL OF
THEOLOGY LIBRARY
HATFIELD, PA.

18568

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Gift of the Author

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION	vii
A. The Problem Stated	vii
B. The Purpose and Contribution of the Study	viii
C. The Subject Delimited	ix
D. Sources of Data	ix
 I. THE METHODIST ANSWER TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE COLONIAL CHURCH	2
A. Introduction	2
B. Religious Problems in the Colonies	3
1. Geographical Distribution	3
a. Growth of Population	3
b. Rural Communities	3
c. Poor Communications	4
2. Personnel Deficiencies	5
a. Lack of Ministers	5
b. Inadequate Training of Ministers	6
3. Church Difficulties	7
a. Denominationalism and Schisms	7
b. Basic Theological Differences	9
C. Typical Attempts to Meet the Religious Problems	11
1. The Congregational Answer	11
a. A Theocratic Society	11
b. Strict Laws	11
c. Isolationism	12
2. The Baptist Answer	13
3. The Quaker and Moravian Answer	15
4. The Presbyterian Answer	16
5. The Methodist Answer	17
a. Wesley's Missionary Trip	17
b. Whitefield's Revival Efforts in America	18
c. Early Churches Established	18
d. "Congregational Methodism"	20
6. The Introduction of Methodist Circuit Riding Under Francis Asbury	21
D. Summary	22
 II. THE BEGINNINGS OF METHODIST CIRCUIT RIDING UNDER FRANCIS ASBURY, 1771-1816	24
A. Introduction	24
B. Asbury, The Organizer of Circuit Riding	24

June 7, 1948

26284

Chapter	Page
1. Asbury Surveys the American Situation- 1771	24
2. His Plan for Circuit Circuit Riding . . .	26
3. Circuit Riding Maintained by Asbury Dur- ing the Revolution	27
C. The Requirements of a Circuit Rider	30
1. Education and Spiritual Preparation . . .	30
2. The Call to Preach	32
3. The Rider's Authority	33
a. His Ordination	33
b. His Appointment	34
4. The Sacrifice Involved	34
a. Hardships	34
b. Obedience	37
c. Home	37
D. Material Provision for Circuit Riders	38
1. His Equipment	38
2. His Remuneration	39
E. The Task of the Typical Circuit Rider	41
1. Objectives	41
2. The Rider's Administration	43
a. On the Circuit	43
b. To Maintain Religious Fervor	43
c. To Promote Building Program	44
d. To Evangelize Old and New Areas	44
e. To Do Mission Work Among the Indians	46
F. The Personnel and Task of the Rider's Lay Workers	48
1. The Class Leader	48
2. The Local Preacher	52
3. The Exhorter	53
G. Francis Asbury as Administrator of the Ameri- can Methodist Church	53
1. An Integral Part of the Anglican Church	53
a. Reports of Circuit Riders	54
b. Stationing the Circuit Riders	55
2. The Christmas Conference of 1784	55
a. Asbury Ordained	56
b. Controversy and Schism	57
3. Growth	58
H. Contribution of the Work of Francis Asbury to American Christianity	59
I. Summary	61

Chapter	Page
III. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CIRCUIT RIDER TO THE LIFE AND GROWTH OF METHODISM FROM 1816 TO 1844	64
A. Introduction	64
B. The Pastor on His Circuit	65
1. His Preaching Appointments	65
a. Meetings in Homes	65
b. Meetings in School Houses	66
c. Meetings in the Open Air	67
2. Typical Service	67
a. The Love Feast	68
b. Preaching by the Pastor	70
c. The Exhorter's Message	71
d. The Altar Service	71
e. The Class Meeting	72
3. Methods for Revival	73
a. The Pastoral Visit	73
b. Personal Evangelism	75
c. Camp Meeting	76
C. The District Superintendent in His District	79
1. The District Quarterly Meeting	79
2. Personal Contacts by the District Super- intendent	80
D. Inter-Church Relationships	81
1. Joint Revivals	81
2. Doctrinal Debates	82
a. Baptism	83
b. Predestination	83
E. Educational Developments	84
1. Periodicals and Books	84
2. Colleges	85
F. Summary	86
IV. CIRCUIT RIDING FROM 1844 UNTIL MODERN TIMES	90
A. Introduction	90
B. The Slavery Question	90
1. Reasons for Slavery	91
2. Schools of Thought	91
a. Pro-Slavery	91
b. The Abolitionists	92
c. Mediate Position	93
3. Proposed Solutions	94
4. The Church Divided in 1844	95
C. The Consequences of Schism	97
1. Bitterness	97
2. Subsequent Decline in Circuit Riding	98
3. Reasons for Decline	99
4. The War	100

Chapter	Page
D. The Circuit Rider Moves to the West and to the Foreign Field	102
1. Expansion into the West	102
2. The Use of Circuit Rider Methods in the Foreign Field	107
a. In Latin and South America	107
b. In Alaska	109
E. Summary	111
V. GENERAL SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS	114
A. General Summary	114
1. Strong Points of the Circuit Rider	115
2. Weakness of the Circuit Rider	116
3. His Major Contributions	117
B. Recommendations	119
BIBLIOGRAPHY	122

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
Figure I	Frontispiece
Figure II	Facing 23
Figure III	Facing 23
Figure IV	89

INTRODUCTION

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CIRCUIT RIDER
TO
AMERICAN METHODISM

INTRODUCTION

A. The Problem Stated

Many volumes have been written telling of the discovery of a western world. Many more books tell of its unmeasured resources and of its conversion from a wilderness roamed by wild beasts to fields of golden grain and teeming cities. The political histories speak of the Government of these United States which has been the envy of many European nations.

But there is one department of its history which is too seldom discussed by historians, viz., the religious area of American history. It is one department of this neglected element of American history which this thesis proposes to study. Of necessity it could not study the entire field of religious history; hence, the circuit rider is the chosen object of study.

Prior to the coming of the circuit rider many varied attempts had been made as a solution to the specific religious needs that greeted America in its colonial days. Separation had been tried; revivalism was attempted; freedom of conscience was espoused; but all of them

failed or at best only succeeded in part. Last of all circuit riding was introduced by Francis Asbury. It is the last of these methods that this thesis proposes to examine.

In terms of the topic this thesis proposes to study the contribution made by the circuit rider to American Methodism. It will attempt to discover the true nature of circuit riding, the organization, the institutions, its ambitions, its personnel, and finally something of its strength, weakness, and results.

It is proposed to devote one chapter to a survey of some of the attempts made by the early colonial fathers to meet the religious needs of these pilgrims. Two chapters will be concerned with investigation of the beginnings and development of the use of circuit riders. A final chapter will study the decline in the circuit organization. The thesis will close with summary and recommendations for present-day pastoral work.

B. The Purpose and Contribution of the Study

It was with the thought that in all probability there are undercurrents of church activity and spiritual power that are not commonly known that this study was begun. The author hopes to be able to find these forgotten methods and adapt them to his own ministry when he has returned to a pastorate in Colorado.

In this thesis the purpose and the contribution are contingent the one upon the other. Presumably a modified type of circuit riding could be realized today and should bear fruit for the Lord of Life.

C. The Subject Delimited

This paper shall discuss principally the circuit riding of the Methodist Episcopal Church of these United States. The omission of religious work of other churches does not intend to suggest that the author considers the contribution of all other groups as negligible. Instead they shall be mentioned as their mention contributes to the proposed study.

Of necessity this paper must make mention of the institutions used by the circuit rider. These institutions include the revival, the campmeeting, and the class meeting. Besides these assets, mention will be made of the lay help used by the circuit rider.

D. Sources of Data

The data for this thesis shall be drawn from both primary and secondary sources. They are listed as follows: Primary Sources, autobiographies, conference minutes, current periodicals - the Christian Advocate and the World Outlook; Secondary Sources, biographies, digests of diaries and journals, histories, current periodicals,

and the conference minutes.

CHAPTER I
THE METHODIST ANSWER TO THE PROBLEMS
OF THE COLONIAL CHURCH

CHAPTER I
THE METHODIST ANSWER
TO
THE PROBLEMS OF THE COLONIAL CHURCH

A. Introduction

As the early Christians scattered under the persecution of Saul, so the separatist groups in Europe scattered due to persecution they suffered, as minority groups in their homeland. Therefore, since America was a new land, it seemed that America was the cure-all for all religious problems.

To be sure, some of the religious groups who came for freedom had a secondary reason for settling in America. They came as missionaries. Thus, they thought that besides enjoying religious freedom for themselves, they would be able to evangelize these natives of the new world. But the dreams were to be realized only in a limited degree, for groups that came as the persecuted became persecutors when another persuasion invaded their haven. Not only did intolerance grow up, but different groups often divided.

The purpose of this chapter is to consider some of the problems that developed within the frontier churches and to show how different denominations tried to meet these problems with varying degrees of success or failure.

B. Religious Problems in the Colonies

1. Geographical Distribution

a. Growth of Population

The natural growth and spread of population placed a great strain upon the religious life of Colonial America. The second generation colonists were native-born Americans who knew no fear of the wilderness; they kept pressing on toward the ever receding frontier. And those, whose parents had come to a land where they might worship as they chose, chose not to worship at all.

The spreading population precipitated still another evil upon these colonists. As they pressed on into new areas, battles against the forests and Indians ensued, and human life came to be one of the cheapest commodities on the frontier. Under these conditions, it was impossible to expect to maintain strong church life, much less to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

b. Rural Communities

It must be borne in mind that in Colonial America, there were no real cities in which to build churches where the worshippers could gather. In an effort to meet their own particular needs, the early Pilgrims colonized and in a limited way attempted to regulate religious matters within the colony. For even in these Puritan colonies, only a small part of the total population were mem-

bers of the church.

And as for the rural people, there was absolutely no attempt to contact them. Had there even been a definite effort to reach these peoples, there were not enough ministers to man all the necessary churches. Nor could these rural communities be expected to attend services in the nearest village, for travel was difficult and often dangerous. Yet, in spite of all its disadvantages, the rural life seemed to be the answer to a very real economic problem in this new land. The young man upon reaching maturity pressed on west to make a home. Thus, the geographical borders of this country were constantly expanding, and seldom did these men carry their religion with them. Young men could begin in business as farmers for themselves without needing any capital. Furthermore, there were no factories in towns to induce men to live in the city. Hence, the rural life of America was almost the only life of these early peoples.

c. Poor Communications

Communication in those days was poor anywhere according to our modern standards, and this new land of America was no exception, for such wide expanses of unclaimed land were never seen before. Though the great migrations westward were not begun, still to these early settlers with few roads and only an ox to facilitate

travel, the distance seemed great. There was no telegraph, telephone, nor mail service. It might take months to find an individual and get a message through via word of mouth or by letter.

The greatest source of communication was from the wagons of eastern people who pressed ever onward to the westward. Of course, these great westward migrations came late in the eighteenth or early in the nineteenth century.

2. Personnel Deficiencies

a. Lack of Ministers

The words of Sweet, though spoken of a German group, is descriptive of most of the American colonists: "In most instances they came without ministers or school-¹masters and were, as a rule, hopelessly poor." Or again Sweet speaks of the religious condition in Virginia:

"Religion was at a low ebb and at the time of the restoration few of the parishes had ministers. When Governor Berkeley was restored to power in 1660 among the first acts passed by the Virginia Assembly was one providing 'for the building and due furnishing of churches, for the canonical performance of the liturgy, for the ministration of God's Word, for a due observation of the Sunday, for the baptism and christian education of the young.' " 2

He further quotes Governor Berkeley of Virginia as having

.

1. William Warren Sweet: Methodism in American History, p. 25.
2. William Warren Sweet: The Story of Religions in America, p. 54.

written: " 'There are forty-eight parishes, and the ministers well paid. The clergy by my consent would be better if they would pray oftener and preach less.' " 1

Here it must be borne in mind that the governor was writing of the state of the Anglican Church, when he spoke of the church thus, for it was tax supported. This condition of having ample ministers was the exception and not the rule. Instead, the case of many communities was different. They would banish a governor or a pastor if he were of another belief.

b. Inadequate Training of Ministers

Until the colonization had progressed far enough to make education possible here in America, all ministers had to be trained in Europe. Often the minister occupied both the position of a pastor and a schoolmaster. But to have to train all ministers in Europe was inconvenient for the work. The Congregational Puritans in New England avoided this trouble by laying their hands on one of the congregation, and thus making him their minister. This method of meeting the need of leadership did provide ministers, but in no way did it furnish any training for them. Often the task was made more difficult due to the religious intolerance of the colonial peoples.

.

1. Ibid., p. 55.

3. Church Difficulties

a. Denominationalism and Schisms

The fact that denominationalism might be a handicap never seemed to enter the mind of these Pilgrim fathers. They had the entire eastern sea coast before them, and that seemed to be ample room. Soon, however, they were to realize the terrible harvest of strong, unchristian religious convictions among themselves. Typical of this attitude was the Puritan colony in New England. Their leader, John Cotton, said in justification of the persecution he instigated against the Baptist who came to New England:

" 'You know not if you think we came into this wilderness to practise those courses here which we fled from in England. We believe there is a vast difference between men's inventions and God's institutions; we fled from Men's inventions . . . we compel none to keep men's inventions.' " 1

If this sentiment of Cotton's had been the only example of this sort, the history of the colonists would, no doubt, have been different. But it was only in rare cases that any toleration was present, and intolerance led to friction and dispersion.

Not only was there strife among various denominations, but there was also conflict within specific church groups. An example of such internal dissention is to be found also among the Congregationalists.

.

1. William Warren Sweet: Religion in Colonial America, p. 134.

" . . . the New England fathers held strongly to the doctrine that the visible church should consist of none but evident Christians, none were admitted to the adult membership of the churches who could not relate some instance of the transforming operation of God in their own lives." 1

The above quotation expressed the sentiment of the early fathers of Congregationalism. This standard, however, was so high that it was not long before there were more men and women in church who had not made a public confession than those who had. Of these later generations, one historian has written:

"-there arose . . . a class of men and women whose parents had been actively Christian, who had themselves been baptised and educated in the Christian faith, were well grounded in the knowledge of Christian truth, were students of the Bible and interested listeners in the sanctuary, who were desirous of bringing up their families in the way in which they themselves had been trained, and who were moral and earnest in their lives; yet could lay claim to no such experience as that which their parents had called a change of heart, and when asked as to any conscious work of God in their souls were compelled to admit that they could speak with confidence of none. It was the rise of this class that thrust the Half-Way Covenant problem upon the New England churches." 2

So the children of unconfessing parents were admitted to baptism on the basis of the Half-Way Covenant, and in this manner, the second and third generation children were retained, and they did not utterly lose contact with the church. But there was a reaction against this

.

1. Williston Walker: The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism, p. 245.
2. Ibid., p. 247.

compromise by those within the church who had retained their original convictions in regard to church membership. These left their old home in New England and settled in New Jersey where they founded "New Ark". And this was no isolated example of what could happen and did happen in the Colonial Church.

b. Basic Theological Differences

There were three general groups of theological beliefs in the colonies and under these major divisions were many modifications.

The hyper-Calvinists insisted that God had from all eternity determined those who would be finally saved and those who would be eternally lost. No man could ever change his status before God. Men might live good lives here, and seem to be good Christian people throughout their lives, only to be lost in the last day, because God had decreed their damnation; any good thing one might seem to do would only add to hell's torments. In some cases, young people, if they thought on these matters, were driven to despair.

At the other extreme of the theological belief were the Universalists, who were sponsored by Charles Chauncy.

"Charles Chauncy, the most important of the Harvard group, after many campaigns against revivalism, Calvinism, and episcopacy, closed his career with three works - Salvation for All Men (1782), The Benevolence of the

Deity (1784), and Five Disertations on the Fall (1785) - in which he cautiously drew the Unitarian and Universalist conclusions implicit in all this mass of liberal doctrine. The goodness of the Creator, he argued logically, implies the goodness of the creation and involves a natural goodness in man as a part of creation. In Chauncy's benevolent universe there was no place for Hell. But Chauncy was well aware that the privilege of being damned, or at least of seeing one's neighbors damned, was too dear to men to permit the dogma of Hell to be attacked with impunity. He discreetly published the most radical of his later works, Salvation for All Men, anonymously." 1

This tract was ably answered by Edwards, the Younger. Nevertheless, the stir caused quite a deadening of the conscience of many men. It will be seen that this extreme doctrine did not come immediately, but that it was an outgrowth of several decades. It spread rapidly, and the whole of New England felt the impact of this reaction against the Great Awakening.

The mediate position was advanced by the Methodist Church. It insisted salvation was necessary in contrast to the doctrine of the Universalists; and it offered salvation to all, as contrasted with the predestination as advanced by the Calvinist school. "Free Grace" was almost their by-word, as they worked in America.

These three beliefs, then, were the contemporary theological positions held by the colonists during the era of circuit riding.

.

1. Ernest Sutherland Bates: American Faith, p. 222.

C. Typical Attempts to Meet the Religious Problems

1. The Congregational Answer

a. A Theocratic Society

Probably no better example of Congregationalism can be found than that of the group in Salem. Here pastor and teacher were officers of equal importance and honor. In either case, the hands of the most devout men were placed on the candidate for the ministry, and his consecration, or ordination, was complete. John Winthrop brought into America eight hundred and forty Puritans who became Congregationalists, and they established several colonies after this semi-theocratic form of government, where the right to vote was strictly limited to church members, and where Congregationalism made up both state and church.

From what has been said here, it becomes apparent that among the Congregationalists there was concern for only the immediate community, and that there was very little concern for outsiders. All attempts toward religion were restricted in scope. It is only fair to note that their Synod of 1646 adopted the Westminster Confession as an accepted expression of their belief.

b. Strict Laws

Something of the Puritan Method could be anticipated in a quotation from Sweet:

". . . the chief reason which determined them to leave

Leyden and to seek a new place of refuge was the painful realization that their children were being 'drawne awaye by evill examples into extravagante & dangerous courses, getting ye raines off their neks, and departing from their parents . . . so that they saw their posterietie would be in danger to degenerate & be corrupted.' " 1

Some Puritans, then, were separatists to the core, and refused to live with groups who tolerated them but did not comply with their ways. The majority of Puritans were not separatists; they believed in working from within the group attempting to purge the mother church rather than to withdraw. But by both groups strict laws were enacted regarding business, voting, Sabbath keeping, and all other aspects of life in order to combat the common social and religious evils of their day. They left no one in doubt as to what the standards of Christian life should be.

c. Isolationism

Among the Puritans the plan to meet religious needs which they considered most promising was isolationism. This plan provided for the deportation from the colony of either groups or individuals who chose to differ from the already accepted views. They believed that by expelling all dissenters and by remaining strictly to themselves that they could maintain their religious purity for themselves and for their children.

.

1. Sweet, The Story of Religions in America, p. 66.

Roger Williams was one of the victims of this religious intolerance. Mr. Williams believed that the government had authority only in "civil things". This view did not harmonize with the Puritan creed, hence they decided he must leave the colony. But due to his sickness, he was granted till spring to recover. This postponement was granted on the condition that he speak no more of his own beliefs. However, as he lay in bed, he failed to obey the restrictions, and a plan was being formed to ship him to England when:

"Forewarned by friends in Boston, Williams, too poor to own a horse, fled on foot into the wilderness, accompanied only by his relative, Thomas Angell. It being the depth of winter, their chances of survival seemed slight; but happily they came upon a settlement of Narraganset Indians who hospitably took care of them until spring. The two then went on to the Seekonk River, where they were joined by five other fugitives from Massachusetts tyranny, and a plot of land was purchased from Massachusetts. Soon, however, word came from Governor Winslow of Plymouth that they were trespassing on territory belonging to Plymouth under Bradford's patent of 1630. Ostracised from both colonies, the exiles wearily moved on to the shore of Narraganset Bay, where they founded the settlement of Providence, so named in thankfulness to God for having brought them at last beyond the reach of their vindictive fellow-countrymen." ¹

2. The Baptist Answer

Probably one of the most outstanding figures in early Baptist history was that of John Clarke. It was he who secured from England the charter for Rhode Island un-

.

1. Bates, op. cit., p. 134.

der a protectorate in 1663. This colony contributed greatly to colonial religion, for it was an example in New England of religious toleration. This freedom of conscience, the charter granted. These people were greatly persecuted whenever they ventured from their home colony.

"The most notable case of persecution of Baptists by Massachusetts authorities occurred in 1651 near Lynn, where John Clarke and Obadiah Holmes had gone to minister to an aged Baptist . . . Here on a Sabbath they were holding services in Witter's home when two constables broke into the house, arrested Holmes and Clarke, who were haled before the court, where they were fined, and in default of which they were to be whipped. A friend of Clarke's paid his fine and he was set free against his protest. Holmes, however, was 'whipped unmercifully' in the streets of Boston." 1

Probably the greatest source of contention, that caused the Baptists much trouble, was their aversion to infant baptism. They stood alone in this belief as against all the others who over-emphasized this sacrament. In time the Half-Way Covenant, which has already been discussed, served as an opening wedge to admit the positions of the Baptists.

Two more tributes should be paid here to the Baptists. Along with the Methodists, they were instrumental in securing the dis-establishment of the churches. Other churches later took up the cause, which

.

1. Sweet, The Story of Religions in America, p. 109.

the Baptists and Methodists had waged alone for many years with varying degrees of success. The other great contribution of the Baptists came later, when they worked "hand-in-glove" with Presbyterians and Methodists in great revival movements. Again it was the question of baptism which spoiled this team of workers for God.

3. The Quaker and the Moravian Answer

Two peace-loving but persecuted religious groups fled from England and Europe to America hoping thereby to find a permanent home where they would be free to worship as they chose.

Under William Penn a large Quaker colony came to America to escape English persecution. Upon arrival the large tract of land, now known as Pennsylvania, which had been given to Penn by the King of England was claimed, and after a satisfactory settlement had been made with the Indians, the settlers were confident of peace and security for all. This colony, unlike most of the others, offered freedom of conscience in worship and in civil matters. Although this new home provided a refuge for the Quakers and the persecuted from other colonies, it did not meet

the total religious problem of America.

It was through Count Zinzendorf that the Moravians secured refuge on the Delaware River above Philadelphia. Since these Moravians were very missionary minded, they developed various industries which supported more than fifty missionaries in their work among the American Indians. By some historians these Moravian missions are rated as the most successful of all Protestant Indian missions of this colonial period.

4. The Presbyterian Answer

Probably the most heralded and the most widely known contribution of the Presbyterians was the Great Awakening, which occurred in 1735. When Jonathan Edwards, the leader of the Great Awakening, ¹ first came to Northampton, he noted an "extraordinary dullness in the religious life of the community". This he describes in a comment:

"Licentiousness for some years greatly prevailed among the youth of the town; they were many of them very much addicted to night walking and frequenting the tavern, and lewd practices wherein some by their example exceedingly corrupted others. It was their manner to get together in assemblies of both sexes, for mirth and jollity, which they called frolics; and they would often spend the greater part of the night in them" ²

.

1. William Warren Sweet: Revivalism in America, Its Origin, Growth and Decline, pp. 30-31.
2. Sweet, the Story of Religions in America, p. 187.

When the Great Awakening came, under the preaching of Edwards, all New England was moved with a sense of the nearness of God. The street corners resounded with the anxious voices of men discussing matters of religious importance. The whole spiritual life of the middle colonies seemed to be changed over night.

From New England, the revival moved on south under the guidance of the Reverend Gilbert Tennent. Out of this awakening in the middle colonies, the revival flame was in time to spread on westward to the frontier. It must be noted here that the revival was of Presbyterian origin, and that it was through this Awakening that the Presbyterian Church wrought one of its greatest contributions to American Christianity. It was to be regretted that the Presbyterian Church was not sufficiently organized and prepared to continue its work in follow-up campaigns, for much of the revival was lost within a very few years before the American Revolution. Liberalism set in where the revival fires had burned the hottest.

5. The Methodist Answer

a. Wesley's Missionary Trip

It was not long after the death of his father that John Wesley volunteered to go to Georgia as chaplain for a company of colonists sent over by Oglethorpe. This trip was before the "heart-warming experience" of Wesley,

and his ministry here was that of a high churchman of the Anglican fold. Though Wesley was to affect the colonies vitally, he was not yet prepared to accomplish his great work. He returned to England, had his Aldersgate experience at the hand of the Lord, and then set to work to revive the English Church, both at home and abroad.

b. Whitefield's Revival Efforts in America

Whitefield's first preaching tour of Colonial America was in 1737, or just about three years after the Great Awakening began in New England. Although Whitefield was a Methodist, and was associated with the Wesleys in the Holy Club, he was not strictly limited to the Methodists in his preaching tours. He was a free-lance preacher who would speak in any pulpit that was open to him. He seems never to have attempted to organize a Methodist Church in America. His main contribution was an orphanage and a university in Pennsylvania. Methodism had to wait longer before its work could really begin in a very constructive way in America. The Methodist Church was the last one to be established in colonial America.

c. Early Churches Established

There are two places that claim to be the first Methodist Church in America. One of these is the church established by Robert Strawbridge on Pipe Creek down in Maryland. The date of its founding is about 1760. This

date is only approximate, for historians do not agree. The consensus of opinion, however, favors another church as the first of all the American Methodist Churches. In the latter part of 1766, Philip Embury, a local preacher from Ireland, began to preach in New York City, and there formed a society of his own countrymen.

Historians trace Embury to Ireland and from thence to Germany. Embury's people came to Ireland due to persecution. Within a comparatively short time, they were forced to leave Ireland due to financial pressure that was brought to bear on them. Naturally, the New World beckoned as a prospective home; so to New York he came. Here in this Anglican town, he settled as a carpenter. He was a "local preacher" ¹ but seemed to have no trouble "hiding his light under a bushel", when he was faced with vice. He sat watching a card game one night when Barbara Heck ² rebuked him for his diffidence. He protested that there was nothing he could do, because there was no church in which to preach. She waived this excuse, and asked, "Why don't you begin church in your home?" He could not answer her, so he began to hold meetings in his own home. Soon the attendance outgrew this place of worship.

The congregation next moved to a store room,

.

1. This term will be explained later.

2. Elsewhere spelled Hick.

where they continued their services. Here they were, when in 1766 Captain Webb appeared on the scene. He was a very eloquent man, though his odd dress appeared frightening for a time. This place soon grew too small; consequently, in 1767, the rigging loft was rented as a place to carry on the services. The rigging loft was a large, rough room, sixty by eighteen feet.

Then the year following, a chapel was leased by the Methodists, the site of which was later (1770) to display a stone structure known as Wesley Chapel. While in prayer, Mrs. Barbara Heck received a plan for the new chapel, sixty by forty-two feet. She presented this plan, and it was adopted by the group. The chapel bore evidence of the persecution the Methodists suffered, for in one room of the building was placed a fireplace that the structure might be considered a dwelling, rather than a church. The Methodists were forbidden to have churches; they could hold services only in their homes.

d. "Congregational Methodism"

It must not be thought that the early Methodists deliberately planned for a church organization. What has been described was quite definitely "Congregational Methodism", and the situation here suggested is one of accident rather than of foresight. Different groups of Methodists merely came to America and settled. In each locality, they preached Christ as Savior, and a society always re-

sulted. But there was never any thought of having a national organization. In this connection it seems necessary to mention that nearly all of these early Methodists came from Ireland - not from England, as one might expect. This fact indicates Wesley's extended evangelistic tours of Ireland.

6. The Introduction of Methodist Circuit Riding Under Francis Asbury

"After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come . . . 'Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way.'" 1

In this land of America an act, much like that of our Lord, was planned by one man, Francis Asbury, and this plan called for the same sacrifice and self-denial.

Written in Asbury's Journal are these words:

"I humbly hope, before long, about seven preachers of us will spread seven or eight hundred miles, and preach in as many places as we are able to attend. Lord, make us humble, watchful, useful to the end of our lives!" 2

In this statement there is revealed one great fact: the leader never sought a task for his associates, which he himself shunned or avoided! Instead, Francis Asbury was willing to labor in the hardest battle fronts of the Lord with the humblest of his fellow-workers. It was Asbury

.

1. Luke 10:1, 3, 4.

2. Ezra Squier Tipple: The Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 19.

who found at last the most effective answer to the problems of the Colonial church. His answer was a circuit riding, itinerant missionary ministry of self-less, Christian, hardy men, who knew the Lord and knew how to reach the outposts of American life with the Gospel of Christ. Asbury not only lived to see the day when the whole eastern coast was evangelized and organized with Methodist circuits, but he also saw Methodism prepared to carry the Gospel from the east coast to the west coast of the United States. He organized Methodism with a powerful evangelizing force throughout America. It is to a study of the ways and means of circuit riding as developed by Asbury and his successors that we now address ourselves.

D. Summary

How was America to hear the Gospel? Were vast numbers of men and women on the edge of the forests to be left without the message of Salvation? Was there going to be no organized attempt to reach the more inaccessible settlements? Or was this newest type of preaching the needed answer? Certainly each attempt so far had made a definite contribution to the colonial religious life. Circuit riding seemed now to hold the only hope of converting and nurturing frontier America.

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNINGS OF METHODIST CIRCUIT RIDING

UNDER FRANCIS ASBURY, 1771-1816



FRANCIS ASBURY



THE SADDLE BAG MAN

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNINGS OF METHODIST CIRCUIT RIDING UNDER FRANCIS ASBURY, 1771-1816

A. Introduction

This organization, circuit riding, now cradled by the American Methodists, was not entirely new, because Asbury, under Wesley, had in a small way grown up as a circuit rider in England. But circuit riding, as it existed here in America, was uniquely American, for it was on a larger scale than ever before. Nor must it be thought that circuit riding was conceived in a vacuum. Instead, it began in a miniature scale, and then expanded as the need justified enlarging. This chapter proposes to study the advance and growth of this itinerant ministry in Colonial America under its organizer and administrator, Francis Asbury, until his death in 1816; the requirements, material provisions, and the task of the circuit rider; and the task and personnel of the circuit rider's lay workers.

B. Asbury, the Organizer of Circuit Riding

1. Asbury Surveys the American Situation - 1771

The first preachers sent to America by John Wesley were inspired by a visit paid him by Dr. Carl Magnus von Wrangel. Subsequent to this visit Wesley made this

entry in his Journal for October 14, 1768:

"I dined with Dr. Wrangle, one of the King of Sweden's chaplains, who has spent several years in Pennsylvania. His heart seemed to be greatly united to the American Christians; and he strongly pleaded for our sending some of our preachers to help them, multitudes of whom are as sheep without a shepherd." 1

At this time Wesley sent two men, Joseph Pilmoor and Richard Boardman, to the American colonies. These men settled each in a city and exchanged pulpits at regular intervals. In this way they hoped they could meet the religious needs of the colonies; their work, however, seemed to be of little consequence.

Though repeated requests for help kept coming to Wesley, conditions continued this way for three years at the end of which time Wesley again asked for volunteers. In a meeting, Francis Asbury, a young man of twenty-six years of age, offered himself as a missionary.

On October 27, 1771, Francis Asbury landed on American soil at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. From Philadelphia he made a trip to New York almost immediately. Within two days, he had sized up the American situation; he saw scattered rural communities with no pastor or church connections of any kind, while city pastors contented themselves to preaching to small congregations in local areas. This condition stirred Asbury, and true

.

1. Wesley His Own Biographer, p. 363-364.

pioneer that he was, he wrote in his journal, "My brethren seem unwilling to leave the cities, but I think I shall have to show them the way." 1

2. His Plan for Circuit Riding

Since his fellowmen had confined their labors strictly to urban peoples, and had refused to venture into the rural areas, Asbury had to find a workable plan whereby this underprivileged population could be reached. The plan he adopted was the one he had so successfully used in England, when he had worked under Wesley, namely, circuit riding.

His first step, therefore, was to organize a circuit, which he himself rode.

"Asbury's Baltimore circuit comprised about twenty-four charges at this time. It extended fully two hundred miles, and was covered by him every three weeks." 2

Some of his early impressions of this new work in America, as recorded in his journal, are as follows:

"In the morning I preached again to a large company of people, with some enlargement of mind, at the house of my worthy friend, Mr. Van Pelt; in the afternoon preached to a still larger congregation; and was invited to preach in the evening at the house of Justice Wright, where I had a large company to hear me. Still, evidence grows upon me, and I trust I am in the order of God, and that there will be a willing people here. My soul has been much affected with them . . . I feel a regard for the people, and I think the Americans are

.

1. Tipple, op. cit., p. 9.
2. Ibid., p. 39.

more ready to receive the word than the English; and to see the poor negroes so affected is pleasing; to see their sable countenances in our solemn assemblies . . . affected me much . ." 1

His travels in this small circuit revealed that there were other needy sections, heretofore untouched, which must be evangelized. When he visualized this vast territory of unreached colonists, he knew he must secure fellow-workers.

3. Circuit Riding Maintained by Asbury During the Revolution

Francis Asbury was John Wesley's assistant here in America. It was not long, however, that he was left unmolested in this work, for John Wesley sent over Mr. Thomas Rankin, an unordained minister, as general superintendent, and he took over his duties from Mr. Asbury. Mr. Rankin never seemed to understand circuit riding, much less Asbury and his circuit riders. At the first conference, 1773, he took opportunity to give vent to his jealousy toward Mr. Asbury by sending him to the very outskirts of Methodism, Norfolk, Virginia. Previous to this conference, he had written such derogatory letters to John Wesley concerning Mr. Asbury that Wesley felt constrained to recall him to England. Mr. Rankin, however, had prevented this letter from reaching Francis Asbury until political events between America and England made the recall in-

.

1. Tipple, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

effective. All English Methodist leaders fled the country after the Boston Tea Party, and again Mr. Asbury was alone. Many of the Methodist preachers were jailed, because Methodism was still connected with the Anglican Church. Wherever the circuit riders traveled, they aroused suspicion. Even Asbury, during the period of the Revolution which followed, was closely watched.

In spite of the various restrictions and handicaps peculiar to an international conflict, Mr. Asbury determined not to lose contact with the American Methodists; he had chosen America forever as his home. Nor were the circuit riders less dauntless, for they rode out the vows which they had taken at the conference of 1773. At this conference, the following questions were asked, and the subsequent answers were given:

"1.

Ought not the authority of Mr. Wesley and that of the conference, to extend to the preachers and people of America, as well as in Great Britain and Ireland?

Ans. Yes.

2.

Ought not the doctrine and the discipline of the Methodists, as contained in the minutes, to be the sole rule of our conduct, who labour in the connexion with Mr.

Wesley, In America?

Ans. Yes.

3.

If so, does it not follow, that if any preachers deviate from the minutes, we can have no fellowship with them till they change their conduct?

Ans. Yes." 1

.

1. Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America, from 1773 to 1813, inclusive, Vol. I, p. 5.

Subsequent to the asking of the above questions and the giving of the answers, the following rules were agreed to by all the preachers present:

- "1. Every preacher who acts in connexion with Mr. Wesley and the brethren who labour in America, is strictly to avoid administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper.
2. All the people among whom we labour to be earnestly exhorted to attend the church, and to receive the ordinances there; but in a particular manner, to press the people in Maryland and Virginia, to the observance of this minute.
3. No person or persons shall be admitted into our love feasts oftener than twice or thrice, unless they become members; and none to be admitted to the society meetings more than thrice.
4. None of the preachers in America to re-print any of Mr. Wesley's books, without his authority (when it can be gotten) and the consent of their brethren.
5. Robert Williams to sell the books he has already printed, but to print no more, unless under above restrictions.
6. Every preacher who acts as an assistant, to send an account of the work once in six months to the general assistant." 1

When it is remembered that this was the first conference in America, and that these men had been separated over a wide area, it is surprising that such strict rules of discipline and order could have been adopted. Undoubtedly, the fact that there were only eleven preachers made such rigorous rules more feasible than otherwise would have been possible.

.

1. Ibid., pp. 5-6.
2. There were eleven ministers and 1160 members reported at this conference. In two year's time, the church had grown from 316 to 1160, and it had spread to five states, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, and Virginia.

These years were very critical for the Methodist Church. First, the Methodist Church was organized only one year before hostilities broke out. Also, the Methodist Church was as yet an integral part of the English Church, and was, therefore, under suspicion by the rebelling colonists. Under these conditions, it was impossible for the circuit riders to travel their circuits. They, for the greater part of the time, were forced into hiding. Furthermore, the personnel was largely English, and with the exception of Asbury the English leadership left America for England.¹ Asbury, however, voiced his determination to stay when he decided:

"It would be an eternal dishonor to the Methodists, that we should all leave three thousand souls, who desire to commit themselves to our care; neither is it the part of a good shepherd to leave his flock in time of danger: therefore, I am determined, by the grace of God, not to leave them, let the consequence be what it may."²

Francis Asbury remained firm in his decision to stay, and was privileged to become one of the two first bishops of the Methodist Church here in America.

C. The Requirements of a Circuit Rider

1. Educational and Spiritual Preparation

Formal education was considered as of only

.

1. Halford E. Luccock and Paul Hutchinson: The Story of Methodism, pp. 152-153.
2. Asbury's Journal, Vol. I, p. 160.

minor importance for a preacher, but it must not be inferred from this statement that Methodism placed a premium upon ignorance. That quite the contrary was true is clearly evidenced by the fact that at the Conference of 1784, when the church was organized, provision was made for raising money to build the first college. And in 1787 Asbury preached the dedicatory sermon at the opening of Cokesbury College, Abingdon, Maryland.

Since a majority of the early circuit riders were not privileged to receive a formal schooling, the greater part of their education came through study of the Scriptures and the divinity books. These they studied both as they rode as well as in public and private devotions. Mr. Asbury was exemplary in his study and in his private prayer. It was his custom to rise early, pray, study for two hours, and conduct family devotions at the home where he had lodged before his day's work was really begun. These study periods were his education and inspiration for his work. He wished much the same for his workers when he made this entry in his journal:

"Jan. 13, 1779

In many circuits the preachers have hardly an opportunity of reading their Bibles, much less anything else. A great part of the day is taken up in riding, preaching, and meeting the classes; and very often at night, there is a large family, but one room for all, and sometimes no candle; so that I think it would be well, under such circumstances, if the preachers could have one spare day in every week for the purpose

of improving themselves." 1

2. The Call to Preach

A "call to preach" was a phrase used by the Methodists to describe an inner consciousness that one must preach the Gospel. Jacob Young was one man who experienced such a call. He was serving as a local preacher with wonderful success when Reverend William McKendree, then District Superintendent, invited him to attend some special services near his home. One evening after church, the above District Superintendent asked Young if he did not consider himself called to preach. Mr. Young declined giving answer that evening, but McKendree was not satisfied with an indecisive response as Young's words indicate:

"The conversation was resumed the next morning, and continued for several hours. Parker came to a decision first - it was that he could not go. He was so decided that M'Kendree gave him up. He turned to me with redoubled energy; told me the fearful consequences of disobeying a Divine call. The last effort that I made to resist his argument was that I was not qualified. He replied, 'I know you are not qualified, but we must do the best we can to supply the work - go and try.' I said, 'I will.' . . . All my friends, both in and out of the Church, said, 'Go;' but it appeared to me it was a work I could not perform. I spent the most of my time in prayer. At length, the clouds dispersed and I saw my way clear, under pleasing impressions that God had called me to this high and holy work. I entered into a calm, settled peace - not a shallow stream, but like a river, deep and wide.

.

1. Asbury's Journal, Vol. I, p. 300.

At the time appointed, I met the elder at Tolert's meeting-house, heard him preach an excellent sermon, and was appointed to fill the vacancy occasioned by the resignation of Gabriel Woodfield." 1

3. The Rider's Authority

a. His Ordination

From the time a young man entered the ministry, he was accepted by this American¹ Methodist Church. No young man was ordained before he began preaching. Instead he must be "on trial" in the church for an indefinite period. At the end of this period, those in authority would evaluate his work. They might readily accept him, or they might decide that he must wait longer for his ordination. The decision of the church was final.

Under this episcopal church government, there were two orders open to a candidate. The first of these was that of the deacon. The deacon was permitted to perform any duty of the minister except to consecrate the emblems at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He must assist in the administering of emblems once they were consecrated.

If he continued in the ministry and his service proved acceptable, his conference would recommend that he be ordained elder. With this latter office, he was entitled to serve in any capacity within the church.

.

1. Jacob Young: Autobiography of a Pioneer, pp. 65-66.

b. His Appointment

In early Methodism, the church was governed by an unlimited episcopacy vested in Mr. Asbury as general superintendent. No one knew the circuits and the rigors of circuit riding as did Bishop Asbury, for it was he who rode the trails and braved all the dangers that any other rider braved. Apparently he lived in the saddle. If it had not been for these facts, it is doubtful that the episcopacy could have survived. It was not surprising, therefore, that Bishop Asbury, a seasoned, capable circuit rider, should appoint preachers to the various circuits in this early period. The Bishop read the appointments as the last item of business at the Annual Conference. When the rider received his appointment, he was expected to leave immediately for his new field. In all of the places the circuit rider was accepted, and his authority was respected, because he was appointed there by the Bishop of this episcopal body.

4. The Sacrifice Involved

a. Hardships

The country had absolutely no roads in these early days. On one occasion, a circuit rider was caught nearly forty miles from his next meeting; due to a heavy rainfall the land looked like a lake, and no guide was present save a distant grove of timber. Added to this,

there was a deep creek to swim. Here even, Peter Cartwright halted, stayed over night in a little cabin, and pressed on the next day when the creek had subsided considerably.¹ This incident in the life of Mr. Cartwright was typical of the frontier life of any circuit rider.

Again, the same preacher was traveling with his buggy when he had to swim his horse across the river along the side of a canoe. He then retraced the watery path, balanced the carriage atop the canoe, and ferried it across the river. When he had reharnessed the horse, hitched the traces, he again was on his way.

Later on, as roads developed, they often led to ferries which crossed the unbridged rivers. The ferries, however, did not always prove satisfactory, for they were dangerous and the rates were exorbitant. In fording one such river, Asbury recorded in his journal for November 6, 1775: "I moved on toward our quarterly meeting, but in fording Meherrin River the water was so deep as almost to swim my horse and carriage."²

Little needs to be said about the hazards of weather save that regardless of the weather, the circuit rider was duty-bound to be on the road serving his circuit. In the summer, he was exposed to the heat, and

.

1. Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, pp. 327-328.
2. Tipple, op. cit., pp. 89-90.

during the winter he had to endure severe exposure. Describing a cold ride, Asbury wrote the following in his journal for February 20, 1777: "The weather was exceedingly severe, and I had twenty-five miles to ride, which almost benumbed soul and body." ¹

Often rowdies and robbers were open enemies, who boldly strove to free the country from any Methodist influence. The circuit riders were attacked by bandits and others, who tried to kill them. The life of Freeborn Garrettson is a case in point, which reads like that of Saint Paul:

"My lot has mostly been cast in new places, to form circuits, which much exposed me to persecution. Once I was imprisoned; twice beaten; left on the highway speechless and senseless; . . . once shot at; guns and pistols presented at my breast; once delivered from an armed mob, in the dead time of night, on the highway by a surprising flash of lightning; surrounded frequently by mobs; stoned frequently: I have had to escape for my life at dead time of night." ²

He then continues with a prayer that he might love God more perfectly and serve him more efficiently.

This type of opposition was not uncommon, nor is it surprising when it is remembered that these men invaded the lair of the devil, where Satan had been conducting unmolested the very vilest sins known. These circuit riders never entered these strong-holds of sin without

.

1. Ibid, p. 110.

2. Nathan Bangs: Life of Freeborn Garrettson, pp. 146-147.

crying against evil.

b. Obedience

The rapid growth of Methodism speaks volumes on the topic of obedience. It seemed not to matter where a man was sent; he was expected to be on the way almost immediately. The appointments reveal that Mr. Asbury was in a real sense a religious dictator. To illustrate, James B. Finley's experience is quoted as follows:

"I had a great desire to go west, because I had relatives which called me in that direction, and it would be more pleasant to be with them; so I sat down and addressed a very polite note to the Bishop, requesting him to send me west. My request, however, was not granted; for when the appointments were read out, instead of hearing my name announced in connection with some western appointment, I was sent one hundred miles further east. To this, however, I responded amen, and after the adjournment of conference I said to the Bishop, 'If that is the way you answer prayers, I think you will get no more prayers from me.' 'Well,' said he, smiling and stroking my head, 'be a good son in the Gospel, James, and all things will work together for good.'" ¹

But unquestioning obedience could not continue very long, as shall be seen. After Asbury's death, the Methodist Protestant Church was formed. ² It sponsored the same reform in church polity, but emphasized identical doctrines as did the regular Methodist Episcopal Church.

c. Home

It is to the credit of Francis Asbury that he

.

1. Autobiography of James B. Finley, pp. 253-254.
2. Luccock and Hutchinson, op. cit., pp. 325-327.

was a keen student of personality. In addition, it was credit due him, because he knew how to use young people in his work for the Lord. No doubt, they made mistakes that would not have been made by older men. However, even in their teens, Mr. Asbury was sending these young men out to preach. In this way, they served the church for several years before they married and had homes of their own. Often the circuit rider might travel a circuit even after his marriage, in which case he had two weeks at home every quarter. This meant that the early circuit rider virtually had no home ten months out of the year.

Later, the circuit riders assumed responsibility for less extensive trips and inaugurated more intensive work within the smaller circuits. There were more week-end trips as contrasted with constant riding and preaching every day. Thus, the circuit rider was privileged to enjoy a degree of home life.

D. Material Provision for Circuit Riders

1. His Equipment

"The outfit of a Methodist preacher at that day was not very expensive. It consisted of a horse, saddle and bridle, saddle-bags, camlet cloak with cape down to the tip of your fingers, a broad-brimmed white hat, and clothes of home made cloth made in the plainest style." 1

.

1. James Erwin: Reminiscences of Early Circuit Life, p. 18.

In this connection, the conference minutes of 1774 stated, "Every preacher who is received into full connection, is to have the use of and property of his horse, which any of the circuits may furnish him with."¹ At a glance, the circuit rider's outfit may seem to have solved his traveling problems, but it must be remembered that a traveling preacher often rode for eight or ten years before being taken into his conference in full connection.

Sometimes in addition to owning a horse, a circuit rider might possess a light buggy. In this manner, the minister's wife could accompany him on his long journeys.

In the typical Methodist circuit rider's saddle bags, one could have found such books as: Watson's Institutes (a heavy theological treatise), a discipline, hymn book, Bibles, and possibly a Pilgrim's Progress. These were the books he read, and which he carried to his parishioners to read. Moreover, since there were no books of lighter reading to be had, they also proved to be the parishioners' childrens' first and only literature.

2. His Remuneration

"Our salaries were not very 'fat'. A single preacher was allowed one hundred dollars, if he could get it; if married, another hundred for his wife, and sixteen dol-

.

1. Conference Minutes, 1774, p. 11.

lars for each child under seven years of age, and for each child from seven to fourteen years, twenty-four dollars. An 'allowance' was made for 'table expense and fuel' of from twenty-five to fifty dollars, according to the ability and liberality of the circuit." 1

To the foregoing statement in regard to financial support, Mr. Erwin appends this comment, "I received about fifty dollars the first year; four dollars in money, the balance in 'store pay' and other things." 2

If the clothing of the circuit rider was unique so was the manner in which he obtained his apparel. One preacher reported:

"When my clothes became seedy, they got me a coat at one place, a pair of 'trousers' at another, a 'waist-coat' at another, boots here, hat there, etc., while the sisters kept my saddle bags well provided with shirts, socks, and handkerchiefs." 3

Naturally traveling in the days of the circuit rider was less expensive than it is at the present time, for it was impossible to travel as far. Furthermore, he traveled by the aid of his horse, and was entertained for the most part at the farmhouses of the various church members along the route of the circuit. Then, in respect to his accommodations, he was on the "plan", so that ahead of time he knew who would give him board and who would give him room. One circuit rider wrote:

"Our circuit was a large one, requiring 325 miles of

.

1. Erwin, op. cit., p. 19.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

travel to go around it. A 'plan' was given me, which called for at least thirty-six sermons in four weeks, besides extras and funerals. This plan gave the name of each appointment, the distance from place to place, the day and hour of each meeting, the family with whom we were to lodge, the place to dine the next day en-route to our appointment, the class leader's name at each place and any other church officer living there." 1

E. The Task of the Typical Circuit Rider

1. Objectives

The West constantly beckoned these early pioneers, and the wagon trains ever moved on toward the setting sun. The circuit rider was awake early to this migration. As a Methodist circuit rider, he found it his duty to keep up with the westward movement. As a result, the circuit riders were ever organizing new circuits in newly settled areas of the country. Some of them, however, left their eastern circuits, joined the wagon trains as chaplains, and followed the movement through to the west coast. Here among these gold seekers, they were permitted to dot the western coast with Methodist circuits.

The following are brief excerpts from the diary of one circuit rider:

"Tuesday 14th. I rode through Hartford to brother J. Leech's, on Shenango . . .
Wednesday 15th. I rode through Meadville, on French creek, to Gravel run . . .
Thursday 16th. I rode to brother King's on the flats of French creek . . .

.

1. Ibid, p. 12.

Friday 17th. I rode through Waterford to R. K.'s -
. . .

Saturday 18th. Set forward for North-east, and stopped at brother Russel's . . .

Sunday 19th. I tried to preach to a large congregation from Acts iii, 19 . . .

Monday 20th. Rode through Canadaway, now Fredonia, to brother Baldwin's . . .

Tuesday 21st. Rode sixteen miles further down the Lake to brother Webb's . . . Here, according to best calculation, I am about two hundred and fifty miles from home . . . " 1

There is nothing spectacular about the events just noted above, but they do indicate that nearly every day the circuit rider spent much time in the saddle. Besides riding daily, the circuit rider had to preach nearly every day - sometimes to a large gathering, and at other times to just a household, but everywhere he went the Gospel went with him. The quotation above also suggests that at this time there were no conflicts with the weather. These pleasant conditions were not a general rule in the winter nor in the spring. In the winter, the fierce blizzards often made travel impossible, and again in the spring the thaw and rains came making it extremely difficult to meet appointments.

But these men were entirely given up to serve God. Often men departed this life, as they traveled. Nevertheless, these casualties did not daunt the circuit riders. On they rode through the wilderness!

.

1. Autobiography of James B. Finley, pp. 277-278.

2. The Rider's Administration

a. On the Circuit

The Apostle Paul wrote, "I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord." ¹ He could hear in America at another day an echo to that prayer. The circuit rider would meet his classes once a quarter, and often there would be some fraction or schism in the church group during his absence. Those responsible were dealt with at once; they were purged from the group. It seemed that the Shakers, Campbellites, New Lights, and other ascetic groups were foremost among these trouble makers. As administrator, the circuit rider was compelled to meet these unruly powers and to keep his church intact.

b. To Maintain Religious Fervor

The historian is well acquainted with the fact that it is difficult to carry the same religious fervor over from one generation to the next. Bishop Asbury saw this difficulty even during his day. On one occasion, he sharply reproved a couple for their carelessness along this line. Said he, as he grasped the woman's hand in a handshake:

"You . . . and your husband belong to the second generation of Methodists. Your son and his wife are the third, and that young girl, your granddaughter, repre-

.

1. Philippians 4:2.

sents the fourth. She has learned to dress and play on the piano, and is versed in all the arts of fashionable life, and I presume, at this rate of progress, the fifth generation of Methodists will be sent to dancing school." 1

c. To Promote Building Program

The building program faced a critical problem which grew out of the customs of the day. For a man to raise a building without the use of whiskey was unthinkable and unsocial. However, the Methodists took a decided stand against the use of spirituous liquors. There they were - the Methodists trying to construct a rough-hewn log church without the use of liquor, and the carpenters insisting that they have liquor if they were to build. Consequently, in many cases the Methodists were compelled to do all their building with no outside help. In spite of this difficulty, the circuit rider encouraged such building enterprises, since meetings in the open air and homes did not prove satisfactory for permanent places of worship.

d. To Evangelize Old and New Areas

There was no rule by which a revival should be conducted, nor how it should start. It might be well to note here that the revival was not a Methodist institution. Rather it was introduced into America by the Pres-

.

1. Autobiography of James B. Finley, p. 276.

byterians, and was used by Jonathan Edwards in the Great Awakening of 1737 before Methodism ever set foot in America.

The Methodists quickly saw the value of revivals,¹ and wholeheartedly adopted the revival as one of their most effective instruments. On some occasions, these revivals began from a prayer meeting, and to clinch the meeting, a preacher would be called in to spend a week or two to consolidate the spiritual gains and to instruct the new converts.

Some of their new work might well have been included under the title of "mission work", for these circuit riders preached to any man who would listen.

Under this caption also, one thinks of New England, not that New England was beyond all contact with the gospel, but that it was not until 1789 that the Methodists did any work in this area. In that year, under Jesse Lee, one of Methodism's most talented ministers, a Methodist circuit was formed in Connecticut and was known as the Stamford Circuit. This proved to be the first Methodist work in New England of permanent value. Reverend Mr. Lee set to work to map out a twenty-point circuit. Out of this circuit he was able to report three classes when conference met the following year, 1790, and as a result Mr.

.

1. Sweet, Revivalism in America, pp. 95-106.

Asbury dispatched three additional preachers to aid Mr. Lee in his work in New England. This is a good example of the kind of mission work these circuit riders undertook in new areas. Methodism never became strong in New England, for up to the adoption of the Constitution, Methodism was given to understand in no uncertain terms that she must stay out of New England.

Probably the manner in which new work was organized was one of the most valuable assets the Methodists possessed. First of all, it will be remembered that the circuit promised only a very nominal fee to their pastor. With this system, there were no financial obligations to be met before a church was begun. If the circuit failed to raise the necessary money to meet his salary, the minister was the loser.

In organizing besides having no financial problems to solve, the Methodist preacher could preach in a home as easily as from a real pulpit. A circuit rider would request the privilege to hold a meeting in a home; the group would grow, and soon a new appointment would be added to the circuit.

e. To Do Mission Work Among the Indians

One unusual example of Methodist mission work is that of Chief Mononcue of the Wyandott tribe of Indians. He was a local preacher in the Methodist Church, and seem-

ed to be a leader of the first order. When the other chieftains listened to some missionary circuit rider, who was on a preaching mission, and while they fell to arguing about their tribal gods, Chief Mononcue would silence them all and tell them of the true God.

Other Indian tribes also shared the blessings of the Gospel. One writer cited Bishop Asbury's home mission effort as recorded in his Journal of 1789 and 1791:

" 'I wish to send an extra preacher to the Waxsaws, to preach to the Catawba Indians: they have settled amongst the whites on a tract of country twelve miles square.' Again in the same year he writes: 'I wrote a letter to Cornplanter, chief of the Seneca nation of Indians. I hope God will shortly visit these outcasts of men, and send messengers to publish the glad tidings of salvation amongst them.' Two years later we find Coke and Asbury preaching to the Indians in South Carolina, and later holding a conversation with the chiefs about keeping up the school we have been endeavoring to establish amongst them.'" 1

Previous to the time of the Methodists, the Catholics with their crucifixes, beads, and charms had come, and their work did more harm than good. Following them came one reforming Indian "prophet" after another. The major emphasis of these false prophets called for a reformation of living and no more drinking; the consummation of their joy would be reached when the white man would be driven away from America. How different was the message of the Methodists! This new message called for a new life

.

1. Sweet, Methodism in American History, pp. 187-188.

also, but it pointed to One who was able and willing to help men live the new life.

F. The Personnel and Task of the Rider's Lay Workers

1. The Class Leader

It is impossible to appreciate the importance or contribution of the class leader, unless one knows something of class meetings. The class meeting, as such, arose in England as a sort of soul clinic. It had a mushroom growth, and soon it embraced hundreds of people from England, Scotland, and Ireland. So rapid had been its growth that Wesley felt compelled to print rules for the class meeting. Moreover, he was kept busy touring the circuits purging out some people who did not measure up to his standard. Some of the rules he enacted for the class meeting were:

- "3. That it may the more easily be discerned, whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies, called classes, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in a class; one of whom is styled the leader. It is his duty,
 - I. To see each person in his class, once a week, at least, in order,
 - a. To inquire how their souls prosper;
 - b. To advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require; . . .
 - II. To meet the minister and the stewards of the society once a week, in order,
 - a. To inform the minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly, and will not be reproved;
4. There is one only condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies, viz., 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be

saved from their sins;' . . . It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation, First, by doing no harm; by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practised. Such as
The taking of the name of God in vain;
The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work thereon, or by buying or selling;
Drunkenness, or drinking spirituous liquors, unless in cases of necessity;
The buying and selling of men, women, and children, with intention to enslave them.
Fighting, quarrelling, brawling; brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, . . .
Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation, particularly speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers; . . .
The putting on of gold and costly apparel; . . .
The singing those songs, or reading those books which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God;
Softness and needless self-indulgence;
Laying up treasure upon earth; . . ." 1

It is easy to see that the responsibility of the class leader was tremendous. But how did he conduct the class meeting? Only illustrations can depict the scenes within a class meeting. Two are quoted below:

"Generally the leader pitched the tune for an opening hymn . . . Followed prayer, fervent, from the heart, that the Spirit of God might be present, to expose the inmost thoughts and imaginings, and to inspire all to new heights of living, and after that the reading of a passage of Scripture, with perhaps a running fire commentary from the class leader.

'Brother Watson', the leader would demand, the reading done, 'how has it been this week with your soul?'

Stammeringly, the lad from the farm just outside the village would rise to his feet. Words would not seem to come. At last, with a mighty wrench, 'I thank the

.

1. I. Daniel Rupp: An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in the United States, pp. 426-427.

Lord, well,' he would mumble, and sit down.

But the old leader was not satisfied.

'Praise the Lord,' he would encourage, and then the probe would go in. 'No wrestlings with temptation?'

'Yes.' The lad's head might hang, but there was never any thought of holding back an answer.

'Did that old temper rise up again?'

'Yes.'

'And did you win the victory?'

'Yes, thank God.'

'Hallelujah, Brother Watson. Go on as you are and one day the crown incorruptible will certainly be yours'

. . .

And the circle would take up and carry to its end the familiar stanza. The next chair would bring a very different type of problem.

'Sister Lee, has the Lord been your support this week?'

No hesitation now. In a moment Sister Lee is on her feet, pouring out a record of spiritual blessings in rich profusion, the whole interlarded with ejaculations of rapture that stir the little company to increasingly fervent responses.

'The blessing of God is upon me', the rapt woman concludes. 'He is my constant portion by day and by night. By him I have been kept all this week from temptation. Life has become a song and a way of glory! Praise his name!'

'Amen!' 'Hallelujah!' 'Glory to God!' come the cries from the group as Sister Lee finally, and with evident reluctance, takes her seat. But the class leader, a shoemaker with a deep knowledge of human nature, is not quite content to leave the matter there.

'So you feel that this has been a week of nothing but spiritual triumph, sister?' he asks.

A fervent affirmative expresses the class member's assurance.

'No hours when the tempter caught your soul in his toils?'

Equally positive is the response.

'You feel that you have the witness of the Spirit to this blessing which has been yours?'

'Yes, yes; glory to God!'

'Well, Sister Lee, this is glorious. How happy you must be! And how happy your husband must be!'

There is a pause; a sudden drop in the temperature that all feel. Sister Lee's husband is not a Methodist; worse, he is a good deal of a town reprobate. But there have been whispers about the village that the erring husband might not have wandered so far or so frequently if conditions had been different at home.

Sister Lee's eyes flash at the question, but she is slow to answer. The leader senses the tension. 'Doesn't your husband rejoice with you?' he persists.

'Him!' The woman can hold in no longer. 'Why, that worthless scamp, he came home the other night and found me singing a hymn-tune. 'Ha!' he says, 'more religion, is it?' At once I saw that he was fixing to make sport of me, so I flung a mop at his head, and he's been quiet since then.'

At first Sister Lee is inclined to bridle at the leader's suggestion that there may be certain spiritual deficiencies to make up before she can rightfully lay claim to the sort of experience that Methodism has called sanctification. But the leader has the backing of the other members of the class in his dealing, and presently is able to pass on to the next member, leaving Sister Lee glowing with a sense of such victories as she has truly won, but also with a lively appreciation of the heights yet to be surmounted.

So the conversation passes around the circle. It is doubtful whether in all the record of religious gatherings since the days of the apostles there has been such an instrument for personal upbuilding as this." 1

.

1. Luccock and Hutchinson, op. cit., pp. 168-171.

The above quotation speaks for itself. As the class meeting was one of the most important of Methodist institutions, so the class leader was one of the most important men in Methodism.

2. The Local Preacher

It is altogether proper that a careful study of the local preacher be made, for in authority, he was next under the class leader. It was he who founded Methodism in America. It has already been mentioned that two local preachers founded Methodist work in New York. This was not the first, nor the last great contribution made by the local preacher to Methodism.

Most of the circuit riders were single men. When they married, the people on the frontier often felt that they could not pay the additional salary required. Hence, his membership was "located", that is, his traveling connection was suspended. He now could settle down somewhere and carry on a secular occupation. Many of these local preachers were "on the plan". Being "on the plan" meant that besides carrying on an occupation during the week he would preach on Sunday in one of the churches near his home. By this "method" the circuit rider had a very real helper in the local preacher.

Whereas, circuit riders often were stationed in a community after years of service on the road, there were

cases in which many local preachers were raised to the position of circuit rider. A man could begin his ministry as a local preacher, and work up to a traveling position. For example, Francis Asbury served in America for over thirteen years as a local preacher before the Christmas Conference of 1784 when he was ordained deacon one day, elder the next, and the day following elected bishop. Thus, not only did the local preacher spread Methodism in America, but also organized it into circuits!

3. The Exhorter

The exhorter was the most inconspicuous of all the members of the Methodist episcopacy. Seldom, if ever, did he attempt to preach. His task was to exhort the people to act upon truth already proclaimed. The exhortation could be given by some traveling preacher who happened to be present at the church service. Occasionally the exhortation took on more of the form of a rebuke for some disorderly conduct during church. The exhorter might rebuke a man for sleeping during church, some girls for giggling, and another man for noisily stamping mud off his boots. Then, he might conclude with an exhortation never to behave like that again.

G. Francis Asbury as Administrator of the American Methodist Church

1. An Integral Part of the Anglican Church

It is a well-known fact that John Wesley never separated from his mother church, but that he lived and died an Anglican. Nor was it his desire that the American church should separate from the English church. Asbury was working for the Methodist group that was very much a part of the Anglican fold. Some groups had arisen within the Anglican Church, some of whom became separatists; whereas, others, as the Methodists, attempted a purge from within without a separation. The Methodist movement of reform is the most outstanding.

The most striking thing about this Methodist group was that though the Anglican Church had no love for them, yet the Methodists were reluctant to separate. The early conference records the question, Shall we separate from the Church of England? The answer invariably came back in the negative. All this changed after political freedom became a reality. This attitude changed over night, and the feeling was that religiously they would be shackled by no foreign power.

a. Reports of Circuit Riders

It will be observed that American Methodism was now seven years of age at the date of this first conference in 1773. The reported membership at this time was 1160, whereas, two years before when circuit riding began, the membership was 316. This means that five years

were spent in local efforts, made by isolated congregations, against two years by the circuit riders. Even though these reports were scanty, it is evident that the circuit rider's reports were more encouraging than were the others.

b. Stationing the Circuit Riders

"Stationing" the circuit rider was different from the appointment of any other preacher. He was not sent to a particular town nor even to a county, but rather to an entire colony or large part of a colony. At the first conference there were eleven preachers reporting for five states. The Methodist Church in polity was an unlimited episcopacy; under this form of government the bishop (or general assistant) appointed all preachers to their circuits. This system, in the future, was to be severely challenged and in time changed. The truth is that most of the splits in the Methodist Church were due to disagreements over the powers of the general superintendent. Stationing the preachers then was much simpler than it was later, for in this early period, the general superintendent did considerable riding on all the circuits, and he knew fairly well the state of affairs everywhere. Moreover, there were fewer preachers to be stationed during this early period.

2. The Christmas Conference - 1784

a. Asbury Ordained

The Methodist Episcopal Church considers 1784 as the date of its birth. The story of Methodism in this period might be told in terms of critical events. The first of these was the coming of Francis Asbury; the second was political and religious freedom; the third was the organizing of circuit riding; and lastly, there was the ordination of Mr. Asbury together with his being elected bishop.

The question of ordination had been a "thorn in the flesh" to the colonists for some time, and especially to the southern colonies where some even went so far as to ordain their own men in protest to Wesley's diffidence in ordaining anyone in America. Finally, in September, 1784, about three years after hostilities between England and the colonies had ceased, John Wesley, without his brother Charles's knowledge, ordained Dr. Thomas Coke, appointed him elder, and authorized him to act as bishop in conjunction with Mr. Asbury. That Christmas the ordination was completed, and Mr. Asbury was elected bishop by the American ministers, thus confirming John Wesley's wish. The ordination wish - considered Wesley's Declaration of American Methodist Independence - was as follows:

"To all to whom these presents shall come, John Wesley, late fellow of Lincoln College in Oxford, pres-

byter of the Church of England, sendeth greeting.

Whereas, many of the people in the Southern provinces of North America, who desire to continue under my care, and still adhere to the doctrines and discipline of the Church of England, are greatly distressed for want of ministers to administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, according to the usage of said church; and, whereas, there does not appear to be any other way of supplying them with ministers;

Know all men, that I, John Wesley, think myself to be providentially called, at this time, to set apart some persons for the work of the ministry in America. And, therefore, under the protection of Almighty God, and with a single eye to his glory, I have this day set apart as superintendent, by the imposition of my hands and prayer (being assisted by other ordained ministers), Thomas Coke, Doctor of Civil Law, a presbyter in the Church of England, and a man, whom I judge to be well qualified for that great work. And I hereby recommend him to all whom it may concern, as a fit person to preside over the flock of Christ. In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and seal, this second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-four.

John Wesley" 1

It is doubtful in the minds of some that Wesley intended the above quoted document to be a declaration of independence, but one thing is certain, it was accepted as such by these Methodist preachers, for they straightway formed the Methodist Episcopal Church.

b. Controversy and Schism

It was not long before the storm over the bish-

.

1. Sweet, Methodism in American History, pp. 104-105.

From the photostatic copy of the original document which is in the Connexional Museum and Library at the Centenary Hall, London.

op's powers broke. A General Conference did not meet until 1792, but at this gathering Mr. James O'Kelly of Virginia presented his protest in the form of a motion clumsily worded. It read:

"After the bishop appoints the preachers at Conference to their several circuits, if any one think himself injured by his appointment, he shall have liberty to appeal to the Conference and state his objections; if the Conference approve his objections, the bishop shall then appoint him to another circuit." 1

From the above quotation, the craft and genius of Mr. O'Kelly do not appear fully, but had his motion carried, the episopacy would have ceased. For three days the church debated the matter. Finally, one minister arose who made a motion to divide the question. He, then, proceeded to suggest the following division:

"1. Shall the bishop appoint the preachers to their circuits?

2. Shall the preacher be allowed an appeal?" 2

At this conference of 1792, the answer to the first question was a decisive "yes", but the answer to the second question came back "no". The episcopacy was saved for the time. Mr. O'Kelly rebelled and drew with him a goodly number both of the ministry and of the laity to form the Republican Methodist Church.

3. Growth

.

1. E. E. Hoss: William McKendree, pp. 56-57.
2. Ibid., p. 57.

The statistics below indicate the mushroom growth of Methodism here in America under the leadership of Francis Asbury:

<u>DATE</u>	<u>MEMBERS</u>	<u>MINISTERS</u>	<u>CONFERENCE</u>
"1771	316	---	----
1773	1,160	11	Philadelphia
1774	2,073	17	Philadelphia
1775	3,143	19	Philadelphia
1776	4,921	24	Baltimore
1777	6,968	36	Harford County
1779	8,577	---	Leesburg
1816	214,235	638	Flavana ⁿ 1

According to the report of 1773 at the conference in Philadelphia, only eleven preachers were reported. In contrast, at the time of Bishop Asbury's death, there were over six hundred ministers. Nor must this total be considered the entire strength of the Methodist Church ministerially, for there were many local preachers who never reported to the annual conference. The membership gain from 1771 to 1816 illustrated the power of God to use humble men in the building of His kingdom in America.

H. Contribution of the Work of Francis Asbury to American Christianity

As John Wesley was credited with initiating circuit riding in England, just so Francis Asbury was recognized as the organizer of the same institution here in

.

1. William Warren Sweet: Religion on the American Frontier, p. 710.

America. Never before had such an extensive undertaking been attempted in any land. Other efforts to evangelize America had failed, or at best had succeeded only locally. It is probable that if the Great Awakening of 1734 had possessed a follow-up program comparable to that of the Methodist circuit rider, no doubt America would have been Christianized earlier than it was.

Bishop Asbury made several outstanding contributions to Methodism during his life in America:

1. He organized circuit riding.
2. He built the Methodist Episcopal Church and served as one of the two first bishops.
3. He rode over 270,000 miles and preached about 16,500 times.
4. He steered this infant church through two war years with his homeland.

In closing his ministry, Francis Asbury preached in the Methodist Church at Richmond, Virginia, March 24, 1816, as he was on his way to conference to resign as bishop; seven days later on March 31, 1816, he passed away in the home of a friend. Of him one has written this tribute:

"Scarcely had Asbury landed in America, when friends importuned him to confine his labors to the more populous centers. They knew not their man; Asbury, above all, was a trailbreaker, a frontiersman, a pioneer. From the first, he determined that the most isolated settlers must enjoy the privileges and inspirations of an organized religious life: his passion, like that of Wesley, was to serve the most neglected. Hence, decade after decade, despite the perils of the Revolutionary War, despite extreme changes of climate and

fury of elements, despite the lurking dangers of untracked forests, quicksand bogs, turbulent torrents, bridgeless rivers and forbidding mountains, he rode regularly some 5,000 miles a year; winning wherever he went devoted followers who became local leaders . . . Like Wesley, he rose habitually at four A.M.; and like Wesley, too, he strove to account for every moment of every day. Self-taught, without fixed abode, a man of the roads, he made it his rule to read one hundred pages of good literature daily. He taught himself Latin, Greek and Hebrew. Always his saddlebags were packed with books which he himself had mastered; and many of these he persuaded not only his preachers and Class-leaders but thousands of his humblest followers, to buy and read. House-to-house visitation, field-preaching, barn-preaching and camp-meetings in tents, were among his chief means of establishing contact with pioneer communities: and always his converts he organized into Classes and Societies, thus nurturing Local leadership. Log schools and Churches, accordingly, reared by the co-operative 'bees' of settlers who hungered for understanding and righteousness, rose up as beacon-lights wherever this holy man went." 1

I. Summary

This chapter has indicated the character and extent of the work of Francis Asbury and his associates. In summary the following outstanding facts are significant:

1. Circuits established in America;
2. Circuits grouped under districts;
3. Districts grouped under conferences;
4. All conferences represented at general conferences;
5. Importance of local workers;
6. Beneficial changes within the episcopacy;

.

1. J. Wesley Bready: This Freedom-Whence?, pp. 314-315.

7. The wages and clothing of the circuit rider a bare minimum;
8. His equipment and education at a minimum;
9. Tremendous practical spiritual contribution of the circuit rider; and
10. Asbury's circuit riding as an effective instrument in conquering a wilderness and evil.

It has been clearly seen in this chapter that circuit riding had the effective answer to the spiritual needs of Colonial America, in the most formative period of our national history.

CHAPTER III
THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CIRCUIT RIDER
TO THE LIFE AND GROWTH
OF METHODISM FROM 1816 TO 1844

CHAPTER III
THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CIRCUIT RIDER
TO
THE LIFE AND GROWTH OF METHODISM
FROM 1816 TO 1844

A. Introduction

The death of Bishop Asbury was a great loss to the Methodist Episcopal Church, for he had been their leader all through the beginnings of circuit riding. It must not be thought, however, that his death came unexpectedly, for he had been a consumptive for years. Moreover, Bishop William McKendree had borne the weight of most of the bishop's administrative tasks for several years. Hence, it was no novice who stepped into the main task of the supervisory duties of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The era which opened at this time marked the beginning of the most rapid expansion known to Methodism. This chapter is a study of the part played by the circuit rider during these twenty-eight years. This period embraced the years from 1816 to 1844, i.e., the date of Asbury's death until the major division of the Methodist Episcopal Church, North and South, over the slavery question. Contributing to the life and growth of the church at this time were, the circuit rider's regular and varied ministrations, his revival methods, his work in co-opera-

tion with the district superintendent, joint revival efforts, and the educational developments.

B. The Pastor on His Circuit

1. His Preaching Appointments

a. Meetings in Homes

The meetings in the homes constituted one of the most fruitful and also one of the most unnoticed areas of Methodist activity. These meetings were unpretentious, and hence, their importance was often overlooked. Concerning one such meeting James B. Finley has related the story of his own conversion. He attended a meeting at a friend's invitation, and was there convicted for sin. He returned home, and continued in prayer until he was soundly converted. Still exuberant with joy, he wrote:

"I then invited the Methodists to come to my house and hold prayer meetings; which they did. Then I went to the place where the circuit preacher had an appointment. After preaching he held class meeting; at the close of which he gave an invitation to any who wished to join the society, on trial, to come forward and give him their hand. I concluded if my wife would join with me, I would give the Methodists a trial, and if I liked them, I would make that Church my home. Accordingly I went to my wife, and asked her if she would join; and on her assenting, I took her by the hand, and we went up together. Several others followed us, and the meeting closed. . . In a short time a circuit preacher came into our neighborhood, and formed us into a class or society, and appointed me the leader. This was an entirely new thing to us all. . . Of those who composed the class, none but myself and wife had ever been in one; and, hence, class meeting to them was an entirely novel thing. I appointed a class meeting, the next Sabbath, at my own house. When the day arrived, the whole surround-

ing country appeared to be on the move. The people came from every direction, and filled the house and the yard, and the lane leading hereto. My father and mother both were there." 1

The progression toward a society is clearly marked in the above incident, for a husband was converted; several joined the Methodist Church on probation; the circuit rider formed a tentative class; and a permanent society resulted which was regularly visited by the circuit rider. It was from home contacts, sometimes less promising than this one, that Methodism conscripted and drew much of its increase in membership.

b. Meetings in School Houses

That these pioneer people did not expect their churches to be very elaborate was to be expected. Their homes and school houses were crude log cabin structures built primarily to keep out the cold, and were used as chapels in which to hold religious services. The following citation gives a glimpse of this period:

" . . . fifty or sixty years ago it cost something more than dollars to be a Methodist, especially to be a Methodist preacher. The little plain, barn-like meeting house, the district schoolhouse, or the town hall accommodated the devoted band, few in numbers, poor in worldly goods but rich in faith, who, with their poorly paid, poorly clad, but persistent and faithful preacher, planted the seeds of Methodism, which, watered by the dews and showers of divine grace and judiciously weeded by the itinerant husbandman, have pro-

.

1. Finley, op. cit., pp. 180-181.

duced the abundant harvest." 1

c. Meetings in the Open Air

One of the richest assets of the Methodist Church was its ability to adapt its methods to almost any situation. This adaptability was indicated by its use of outdoor meetings. This comment is not intended to suggest that only the Methodists preached out of doors, but it does strongly intimate that no church was more expert in meeting such emergencies. Many stories of the resourcefulness of the Methodists in this field have been preserved. One writer told how her husband, upon returning from a month's circuit, announced that he would preach in a park. Said she:

"The novelty of out-door preaching attracted a large number of people, many coming from quite a distance . . . On this occasion, Mr. Tucker, mounted on the stump of a tree for a pulpit, spoke with great fervor and power . . ." 2

From this open air service there arose a class of Methodists to whom the circuit rider regularly ministered. It was consistently in this manner that the circuit rider tried to go where his message would be most readily accepted. Once he began a class, he watched over it with an eagle eye to see that it grew and prospered spiritually.

2. Typical Service

.

1. Mrs. Mary Tucker: Itinerant Preaching in the Early Days of Methodism, p. 5.
2. Ibid., p. 47.

a. The Love Feast

The "love feast" was one of those sacred times in the life of the Methodist. It was unique in character, for in the service a plate containing bread and a vessel containing water were passed across the row of seats much as an offering plate would be passed today. Each individual partook of both the bread and the water. Here the utmost honesty was present as faults were confessed and prayer requests made. No Roman Catholic speaking to the father confessor was ever more honest. The difference here was that all confessions and prayer requests made were spontaneous - not compulsory.

But there was also a joyous side to this service. After the bread and water were passed and the testimonies had begun, one circuit rider wrote:

"The testimonies were usually clear, positive, and earnest. 'No uncertain sound'; nothing doubtful; conversion clear; the witness of the spirit distinct; the efficacy of the cleansing blood, the abiding comforter . . . What shouts of praise! What songs of triumph! What ecstasies of joy." 1

Where such honesty was manifest, it was to be expected that close vigilance should be exercised lest some creep into the service merely for the sake of satisfying curiosity. The circuit riders were extremely cautious to see that no hypocrite invaded these sacred services.

.

1. Erwin, op. cit., p. 17.

As a precaution, the following rule was agreed to by all members present at the first conference of 1773:

"No person or persons to be admitted into our love feasts oftener than twice or thrice, unless they become members; and none to be admitted to the society meetings more than thrice." 1

A further check on the membership seemed advisable, for some members would show no signs of regeneration when on the home circuit, but when in attendance at district gatherings, they would feel much freer, and would testify to wonderful salvation. Since circuit riders refused to tolerate such deceit, the love feast coupon emerged. Though the song and the Scripture varied, the coupon was approximately as below:

_____	Member
Methodist Episcopal Church Founded A. D. 1784	
Quarterly Ticket _____	18 _____
_____	Minister
Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure - Phil. 2:12, 13	
Nothing is worth a thought beneath But how I may escape the death That never, never dies. 2	

.

1. Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America, 1773-1813, inclusive, p. 6.
2. From an original in the Library of the Methodist Historical Society, 150 Fifth Avenue, N. Y.

As long as these two measures were used by the circuit rider, they were almost a fool-proof check on church membership.

b. Preaching by the Pastor

The preaching service followed the love feast, and it was open to all. It was the standard method of presenting the Gospel to the sinner and of inspiring the saint. Of course, there were regular preaching services held by the local preacher in these chapels, but the great occasions were those Sunday services when the circuit rider was present to deliver the sermon.

The sermon was often an hour or more in length, but even so, the congregation was very attentive. His sermon was often very bold as might be expected, for, as he lived on the frontier and faced all types of sin and lewdness, he felt he should be quite explicit in the sins he exposed. As the circuit rider was extremely pointed in condemning sins, he could be expected to preach against all the evils listed by the Apostle Paul as works of the flesh.

Though these sermons were fiery and pointed, yet few were ever written. There were two reasons for unwritten sermons: first, there was strong reaction against reading sermons from a manuscript; moreover, since these preachers were continually in the saddle, they had no

time for sermon writing. Concerning these extemporaneous messages, Sweet has written:

"Uneducated, as far as the schools were concerned, they left behind scant records of their lives and few written sermons. Theirs were 'the short and simple annals of the poor.'" 1

c. The Exhorter's Message

Immediately following the sermon came the exhortation, which might have lasted for an hour or more. In this service the exhorter endeavored to maintain, if not to intensify, the same atmosphere which the previous service possessed. In character, his message was supposed to be hortatory. As a result of his exhortation, it was not at all uncommon for men and women to shriek and to scream at the top of their voices, some making a call to repentance. Often the entire assembly was convulsed, and then made a mad dash for the "mourner's bench", or altar, in the front of the chapel. Some would be "slain" by the power of God; still others would dash outside, there to fall, or hurriedly to retrace their steps, and seek God until they found His peace.

d. The Altar Service

It was generally at the altar that people wept and prayed for the forgiveness of their sins, until they

.

1. Sweet, Revivalism in America, p. 91.

arose to their feet with their faces all aglow with the glory of God. In the case of others, an air of agony and anguish prevailed, which indicated that they were not re-born. At such times, the Methodists strongly pressed for a certainty, which they called the "witness of the Spirit".¹ Often these services continued throughout the night; workers at the altar interspersed their praying with songs, exhortations, and testimonies. No would-be convert could expect to leave the altar without either testifying to his new-found relationship with God, or without stating his purpose to seek God until he found Him.

e. The Class Meeting

Normally the class meeting followed either the Sunday morning service or the altar service, if the latter was not too protracted. This meeting gave all new converts an opportunity to give expression to their new-found joy. They, in turn, listened to the older Christians speak of the keeping power of Christ. Thus, each one was encouraged to press on to ultimate victory. For a lengthier description of the class meeting, refer to the preceding chapter where the treatment is more complete under the caption, "The Class Leader".

.

1. Romans 8:16.

3. Methods for Revival

a. The Pastoral Visit

It was not surprising that the coming of the circuit riding pastor was an event greatly anticipated by the members, for in many cases he came but once a quarter. Since many circuits covered an entire state, it was impossible to visit any one society very often under such vast geographical difficulties. One man wrote concerning his circuit:

"My custom was to go around the district every three months, and then return to New-York; where I commonly stayed about two weeks. In going once around I usually traveled about a thousand miles, and preached upward of a hundred sermons." 1

If the circuit rider should find a definite response to the Gospel at any particular point while he was making his periodical visits, he would remain there to continue the revival effort. Then in order that succeeding appointments on the circuit might be kept, the assistant would be sent on to the next place.

It must not be thought, however, that the circuit rider was always cordially received, for Freeborn Garrettson tells of going to a home where the wife made a double attempt to poison him. She set out some poisoned drinking water, and in addition to this, she poisoned the meat, which was to be served for dinner. Mr. Garrett-

.

1. Bangs, op. cit., p. 174.

son was warned of God and refused to eat of the noxious food. Instead, he prayed with the sick husband and left for his next appointment.

Many times the humanity of the preacher was revealed by the comments in his journals. Often he was sent to a new circuit only to "find the tide out" spiritually speaking. Such was the case when Jacob Young was appointed to the Limestone Circuit in Ohio. He was tempted not to go, but rather to go home to his father to recover his health. After praying about the appointment, he rather gingerly began his first round, and made the following entry in his journal:

"Our first quarter was a very dull one. I do not believe there was one soul within the bounds of the circuit converted during the quarter. Brother Burke came to our quarterly meeting, and brought with him a brother M'Guire. They labored hard, but appeared to produce but little effect, and I concluded I was going to have a barren year. I went to Maysville, and spent several days; gave myself up entirely to prayer and reading the holy Scriptures. One evening, I was walking the banks of the Ohio river, solitary, when the Holy Ghost visited my soul and gave me what I call a Divine assurance that I should have a very prosperous year; and I began to preach with more zeal and more courage than usual." 1

About this time, the district superintendent removed Reverend Young's helper, and another by the name of Miles Harper was sent in his stead. Soon another entry of an entirely different tone appeared in the journal:

.

1. Young, op. cit., p. 167.

"The next revival began at Flemingsburg, and spread with great rapidity - nearly round this large circuit. Early in the summer, we held a camp meeting near Mill's station. We were blessed with ministerial help . . . The Captain of our salvation appeared to be both in the front and in the rear. Parker, Quinn, and Askings did the preaching; Harper and I exhorting and laboring at the altar. This meeting lasted about one week, and I suppose there were about one hundred converted." 1

b. Personal Evangelism

As Jesus delivered some very pointed messages to lone men, just so the circuit rider, under God, was privileged to make some vital contacts with individuals.

There was no man who surpassed Peter Cartwright in wit and good logic when such opportunities presented themselves. On one occasion he was confronted with a medical doctor, an avowed atheist. To support his opinion, the doctor used pseudo-logic of a very clever twist. Mr. Cartwright was fair to the doctor, and then a conversation followed which resulted in the conversion of the so-called atheist. The doctor thought because one could not see, hear, smell, nor taste religion, it was non-existent. He was willing to grant Mr. Cartwright that there was one of the senses, feeling, which could perceive religion. But the doctor argued that the witness of the senses was overpowering against their being any religion. Peter Cartwright, then, took the doctor's

.

1. Ibid, p. 168.

argument and applied it to the medical doctor's practice. He accused the doctor of obtaining money under false pretenses, for he contended that there was only one sense, feeling, which experienced the reality of pain. Cartwright extended the invitation to kneel and pray. Concerning the doctor's reaction, the minister wrote:

"The Doctor fell on his knees and wept like a child, and prayed fervently. The great deep of his heart was broken up, his infidelity gave way, and, for the first time in his life, he wept and prayed. All day after this he seemed to be melted into childlike simplicity. He fled to the woods, and earnestly sought salvation. That night, after prayer, he retired to bed, but not to sleep, for he prayed as in agony; and about midnight God spoke peace to his troubled soul, and we all awoke and got up, and joined in prayer and praise. Such thrilling shouts I seldom ever heard from the lips of a mortal man. His conversion was the beginning of a glorious revival of religion in the settlement, and many were the souls saved by grace." 1

c. The Campmeeting

Although the camp meeting is often attributed to the Methodists, as one of their creations, such was not the case, for they borrowed it from the Presbyterians, and the Baptists. However, the follow-up work of the Methodists by both ministerial and lay workers caused them to excell all other churches in concrete gains through the camp meetings.

To some, the "demonstrations" which took place on the campground was one of the chief benefits of the

.

1. Cartwright, op. cit., pp. 513-514.

campmeeting. Many of the early circuit riders were converted amid an atmosphere steeped with the presence and the power of God, while the shrieks of the unsaved and the shouts of the saints were as the "voice of many waters". Later, though the ministers constantly preached against excessive demonstration, these same men were to see like scenes re-enacted under their own ministry. One circuit rider told of one camp meeting experience as follows:

" . . . the mighty power of God was displayed in a very extraordinary manner; many were moved to tears, and bitter and loud crying for mercy. The meeting was protracted for weeks. Ministers of almost all denominations flocked in from far and near. The meeting was kept up by night and day. Thousands heard of the mighty work, and came on foot, on horseback, in carriages and wagons. It was supposed that there were in attendance at times during the meeting from twelve to twenty-five thousand people. Hundreds fell prostrate under the mighty power of God, as men slain in battle. Stands were erected in the woods, from which preachers of different Churches proclaimed repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and it was supposed, by eye and ear witnesses, that between one and two thousand souls were happily and powerfully converted to God during the meeting. It was not unusual for one, two, three, and four to seven preachers to be addressing the listening thousands at the same time from the different stands erected for the purpose. The heavenly fire spread in almost every direction. It was said, by truthful witnesses, that at times more than one thousand persons broke out into loud shouting all at once, and that the shouts could be heard for miles around." ¹

The time spent in each camp meeting would ordinarily be ten days or possibly two weeks. Each family

.

1. Ibid., pp. 30-31.

in a wagon with provisions, drove to the site of the camp meeting, where they camped for the period of the meeting. The time for such a gathering must of necessity have been during the summer, else the cold would have been prohibitive.

As for location, a nice grove of trees was chosen in a central location, as convenient as possible for all the members on the circuit. This type of place provided the shade necessary for tenting as well as pasture for the horses.

The attendance of every circuit rider from surrounding circuits was imperative, unless he was sick, or could show some other good reason why he could not be there. These were the men who, along with the district superintendents and a bishop, constituted the leadership personnel for the camp meeting.

Though attended by large numbers of ministers, the camp meeting was primarily designed for the lay member and to reach outsiders in the community. Hundreds of people, lay members, exhorters, local preachers and outsiders, from the surrounding areas attended these services every summer. To the lay members, the camp meeting was a Christian celebration anticipated many months in advance. Not only did members desire to fellowship with others from the various preaching points, but also to receive inspiration from the messages given by the

circuit riders, exhorters, and the bishop.

All who came to the camp meeting, however, did not come to be edified spiritually nor to see the salvation of souls. Such was far from the truth, for many came to stir up trouble in every possible way, and others came to peddle their wares.

So manifold was the opposition wrought by these clever trouble-makers that it taxed the intellect and brawn of the finest circuit rider to nullify their deviltry. These rogues mimicked the preacher, staged pseudo-services, made parodies of songs, and sold whiskey on the campground. On one occasion, Jacob Young told of trying to reason with the desperadoes, but all to no avail. Consequently, he visited the camp with a sledge hammer when the men were away. He pounded in the ends of all the barrels and allowed the whiskey to run out on the ground. In this case, the trouble-makers broke up; some came to the revival and were converted, while the others went their way.

C. The District Superintendent in His District

1. The District Quarterly Meeting

No time was more highly cherished by the Methodists (unless it was the camp meeting) than was the district quarterly meeting, which met every three months at some designated place within the district. At these

times, people from all adjacent areas left home and came to the services. Of these meetings, one has written:

"But the great meeting for the members of the church was not the camp meeting nor the class meeting, but the quarterly meeting. Then it was that the sacraments were administered and the love feasts held. To these meetings came both the senior and junior preachers of the circuit, and church members from all points of that circuit. Preaching began on Friday evening or Saturday morning and lasted until Monday morning. On Sunday the presiding elder did the preaching. There was no call for converts until Sunday night. Sometimes the converts were gathered here by the hundreds, and always these meetings were regarded as an evangelistic opportunity. But fundamentally they were the meetings at which church membership, as such, was most magnified." 1

2. Personal Contacts by the District Superintendent

The district elder, or superintendent, was a man chosen by the annual conference to oversee several large circuits. It was his responsibility to hold the district quarterly meetings, as well as any quarterly meetings for which he could find time. Naturally he had to ride almost incessantly to meet all necessary demands over his district. He was free to suggest new men, to organize new classes, and to make any other changes on his district which seemed advantageous.

It was on one of these extended trips that Peter Cartwright, a district superintendent, was caught in a strange place. As a dance was planned for the even-

.

1. Luccock and Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 272.

ing, Cartwright sat down in a corner hoping for a chance to preach to the group later on. He had not long to wait, for a young lady invited him to dance with her. Thereupon he grasped her hand, led her to the middle of the floor, and explained that it was his habit to pray before attempting anything important. With this statement, he tightly gripped the young lady's hand, and dropped to his knees and prayed. He summarized the total effect of this incident thus:

"While I prayed some wept, and wept out loud, and some cried for mercy. I rose from my knees and commenced an exhortation, after which I sang a hymn. The young lady who invited me on the floor lay prostrate, crying earnestly for mercy. I exhorted again, I sang and prayed nearly all night. About fifteen of that company professed religion, and our meeting lasted the next day and next night, and as many more were powerfully converted. I organized a society, took thirty-two into the Church, and sent them a preacher. My landlord was appointed leader which post he held for many years. This was the commencement of a great and glorious revival of religion in that region of country, and several of the young men converted at this Methodist preacher dance became useful ministers of Jesus Christ." 1

D. Inter-Church Relationships

1. Joint Revivals

In the pioneer communities, it was not at all uncommon for the various churches to unite forces in a revival, or even in a camp meeting. The personnel of

.

1. Cartwright, op. cit., p. 208.

these joint efforts was constituted of the Baptists, the Presbyterians - especially the Cumberland Presbyterians, and the Methodists. It was more than probable that the work of Whitefield contributed much to this spirit of co-operation, for though he was a Methodist, he never refused an opportunity to preach any place, nor did it matter in whose church he preached. Abel Stevens, as quoted by J. W. Bready, said:

"The Congregational Church of New England, the Presbyterians and Baptists of the Middle States, and the mixed colonies of the South, owe their later religious life and energy mostly to the impulses given by Whitefield's powerful ministrations . . . the New England Churches received under his labors an inspiration of zeal and energy which has never died out. He extended the revival from the Congregational Churches of the Eastern to the Presbyterian Churches of the Middle States. In Pennsylvania and New Jersey . . . he was received as a prophet from God; and it was then that the Presbyterian Church took that attitude of evangelical power and aggression which has ever since characterized it . . . The stock from which the Baptists of Virginia, and those of the South and South West have sprung, was also Whitefieldian. And, although Whitefield did not organize the results of his labors, he prepared the way for Wesley's itinerants." 1

2. Doctrinal Debates

It was impossible that such wholehearted co-operation should continue forever. Certainly it came to a premature grave in America, for these leaders were men of strong convictions. Those who had labored as friends and fellow-workers often parted as enemies.

.

1. Bready, op. cit., pp. 313-314.

a. Baptism

Naturally, the Methodists and the Baptists disagreed on the mode of baptism. The Baptists insisted on immersion if baptism was to be genuine. Whereas, the Methodists accepted any form of baptism desired by the candidate. Consequently, they staged public debates over the question of baptism. Because Mr. Cartwright was one of the most prominent debaters, his experience is quoted here in regard to these church troubles:

"It was with the denominations which required the immersion of their members - the Baptists and the Christians - that Cartwright did most of his debating. Slinging texts back and forth at each other in those days when one Bible verse was thought just as authoritative as another, the doughty champions stirred many a community to its depths, but it is doubtful whether or not they accomplished much for the cause of vital religion. 'Water! water! water!' Cartwright once snorted after one of his encounters with a Baptist. 'You might think that heaven was an island, and the only way to reach it by swimming there!'" 1

b. Predestination

It has already been shown that the polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church was a very high episcopacy. In contrast, her sister churches boasted a loose, congregational form of church government. In regard to salvation, however, the order was reversed; the Methodists made every man responsible for his own soul, whereas, in the other churches, a gospel was preached that made the in-

.

1. Luccock and Hutchinson, op. cit., pp. 282-283.

exorable decrees of an Almighty God abiding, and maintained that God had not only foreknown, but had also predestinated every act and choice of man. Relevant to this subject is the statement made by a Methodist historian, who refers to the Presbyterian, the Baptist, and the Congregational churches as follows:

"The first three churches, which left matters of church government almost entirely in the hands of local congregations, proclaimed a God absolutely sovereign over the individual, who predestined whom he would to eternal damnation and foreordained whom he would to glory. Some of these frontier Calvinists did not hesitate to go the whole length, preaching the damnation of infants, and that there were infants in hell a span long. With every life foreknown, foreordained, and predestined, it is easy to see that the appeals of the evangelist would lack something of promise." 1

E. Educational Developments

1. Periodicals and Books

The American Methodists early realized the need of reading material if the church was to grow, and 1844 records indicate that:

". . . the first book being published in the year 1789, by the Rev. John Dickens, who was the first book-steward, and was at that time stationed in the city of Philadelphia, where the book business was begun. Its commencement was very small, for it had no capital to begin with, except about six hundred dollars, which John Dickens lent to the Concern, to enable it to commence its benevolent operations. It has gone on from that time, however, gradually increasing the number and variety of its publications, until it has reached its present enlarged dimensions. Its location is 200

.

1. Ibid., p. 263.

Mulberry Street, in the city of New York." 1

This book concern, then established about four years after the organization of the church, printed the books which the circuit riders carried with them. That these were well chosen was evident, for they virtually constituted a liberal education in that era.

The Concern with its humble beginning had constantly augmented until in 1844 there were:

" . . . published a great variety of books on theological, historical, scientific, and philosophical subjects, Bibles and Testaments, commentaries upon the Holy Scriptures, a Quarterly Review, and a Weekly Religious Journal, Sunday School books, and tracts, all of which have an extensive circulation throughout the United States and Territories." 2

2. Colleges

Though many of the early circuit riders were uncouth, poorly educated men, they early made provision for the education of their successors. Of the conference in which Methodism was organized as a separate church here in America, one author wrote:

" . . . a plan for the establishment of a college was adopted, and immediately after the adjournment of the conference, it was published; and Dr. Coke and Bishop Asbury set themselves to work to carry it into effect by soliciting subscriptions, and selecting a site for the buildings. They finally succeeded in erecting a brick building, 80 feet in length and 40 in width, in the town of Abington, about 25 miles from the city of Baltimore, a spot of ground which gave a delightful

.

1. Rupp, op. cit., p. 452.

2. Ibid.

and commanding view of the Chesapeake Bay, and of the country for twenty miles around. The college was opened for the reception of students on the 10th day of December, 1785, and continued in successful operation until the 7th day of December, 1795, just ten years, lacking three days, when the whole was consumed by fire. A second, which was soon after erected in Baltimore shared the same fate." 1

Later attempts, however, were more successful. The church's continued interest in education was clearly evidenced, for

"The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1820 recommended to all the Annual Conferences that they establish as soon as practicable literary institutions under their control. At this same General Conference also legislation was enacted permitting the bishops to appoint traveling preachers as officers and teachers in schools and colleges. Previously the Church had discouraged preachers from leaving the active itineracy to engage in teaching . . . the next twenty years (1820-1840) may well be termed the great college-building era in American Methodism." 2

That the above injunction of the General Conference of 1820 was obeyed is indicated, for by 1840 there were seminaries, academies, colleges and universities dotting every region touched by Methodism. The following quotation is relevant here:

"By 1840 there were at least twenty-eight academies, seminaries, and manual-labor schools in operation under Methodist auspices, each of them sponsored by an Annual Conference. These institutions were well distributed throughout the country and were by no means confined to the North." 3

F. Summary

.

1. Ibid., pp. 453-454.
2. William Warren Sweet: Indiana Asbury-De Pauw University, p. 22.
3. Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 215.

The era that closed in 1844 was the time of the most rapid growth and expansion known in all Methodist history. This expansion was attained by careful pruning on the one hand, and by gentle nurture on the other. Every contact was carefully guarded; when a man was converted at one of the various types of revival efforts, he was visited by the class leader, and nourished by the messages of the local preacher.

The circuit rider was largely a religious administrator, and because he was before the public so much, it was not surprising that he should be the first to sense the need of higher education to equip him and his successors better to preach the Gospel message. His main contributions were: (1) thousands of conversions to Christianity, (2) thousands of accessions to Methodist church membership, (3) mushroom growth and spread of the Wesleyan movement, (4) the establishment of academies, seminaries, colleges, and universities, (5) and the maintenance of a highly acceptable publishing house.

CHAPTER IV
CIRCUIT RIDING FROM 1844
UNTIL MODERN TIMES

CHAPTER IV
CIRCUIT RIDING
FROM
1844 UNTIL MODERN TIMES

A. Introduction

It was a crippled and divided church that left the General Conference in the year of 1844. The session had been long - over a month's duration; the chief issue was, Shall slavery be allowed in the Methodist Episcopal Church or no?

As the debates continued, each side tended to strengthen its position - with heat, not with logic. Eventually the conference minutes occupied over fifty pages of fine print. This space was even more noticeable when it was remembered that heretofore the conference had lasted only a few days, and it was not unusual to find appended to the conference minutes such a note as, "The conference parted in perfect harmony". It was not so at this time, for heartache, rebellion and anger rankled in the hearts of most of the circuit riders. They had believed they were building a unified church, and now they saw the united church, which they had envisioned, disappearing.

B. The Slavery Question

1. Reasons for Slavery

"The invention of spinning and weaving machinery created an increasing market for raw cotton in England, while the invention of the cotton gin (1792) made possible the profitable growing of the short staple cotton in the South, and thus greatly increased the total output. Between the years 1791 and 1795 the total production of cotton in the South was 5,200,000 pounds; between 1826 and 1831 the South produced 307,244,400 pounds. Cotton soon became the most important single crop of the nation, and in 1860 it constituted fifty-seven per cent of the total exports of the United States. The economic revolution going on in the South is also reflected in the rising value of slaves. In 1790 good Negroes could be purchased for \$300; the same Negro in 1830 brought \$1,200, and in 1860 from \$1,500 to \$2,000. Thus cotton became the "King" crop of the nation, and since it was generally considered by Southerners that cotton could not be raised without slave labor, slavery became to them an indispensable institution." 1

Besides the new invention which enabled the plantation owners to produce more cotton with slave help, and the increasing cotton market, there were other reasons for the continuation of slavery in the United States. There were state laws which forbade manumission of slaves. In some states a slave never could receive papers indicating that he was a free man.

2. Schools of Thought

a. Pro-Slavery

That slavery was a regularly accepted institution is clearly evidenced, for

"By 1844 there were at least 200 traveling preachers

.

1. Sweet, Methodism in American History, pp. 235-236.

owning 1,600 slaves; a thousand local preachers held 10,000; while there were at least 25,000 Methodist laymen holding more than two hundred thousand slaves." 1

Thus, from this quotation it is apparent that a strong pro-slavery party had arisen far divergent from the original Methodist position. In fact, there were in reality, two schools of thought under one general government. Of necessity, such a condition must come to a focus; this it did in the Conference of 1844. There the slave holders met the ultra abolitionists to battle about six weeks over slavery.

b. The Abolitionists

Northern Methodists chafed increasingly under the indecisive approach of the Methodist Episcopal Church in meeting and answering the slavery question. As time passed, this anti-slavery attitude gained more support; nowhere was this feeling more intense than in the New England states, which became the hot bed of abolitionism.

Some abolitionists were content to await for decisive theological and Biblical arguments and action at the coming general conference. Others throughout the North, however, reminiscent and impatient of the indecisive action of the previous general conference, resolved to take a united stand against slavery.

.

1. Ibid., p. 273.

Contributing to some extent to this anti-slavery antagonism were numerous tracts, which were freely circulated. In 1840, slavery was argued eloquently pro and con. One writer in speaking of a heated address given by Orange Scott wrote:

"I never can forget the masterly manner in which he met the objection that abolitionists were blinded by prejudice and working in the dark. "Blind though we be," he remarked, "aye, sir, though blind as Samson in the temple of Dagon, like him, if we can do no more, we will grope our way along, feeling for the pillars of that temple which has been consecrated to the bloody rites of the Moloch Slavery; and, grasping their base, we will bend forward, nerved by the omnipotence of truth, and, o'erturning the supports on which this system of abomination rests, upheave the entire fabric, whose undistinguishable ruins shall yet mark the spot where our grandest moral victory was proudly won." The climax was complete; the applause was unbounded as the speaker retired. Upon inquiry, we heard the name of O. Scott, now so well known among the ablest advocates of the slave's cause.'" 1

Consequently, in the two years following 1842 twenty thousand scattered Northerners withdrew from the Mother Church, and formed a new body called the American Wesleyan Methodist Church. Among its laws was the article that no member could hold slaves.

Apparently the tension had eased momentarily. But as soon as the Conference of 1844 convened, it was revealed that further trouble was threatening.

c. Mediate Position

.

1. J. M. Buckley: The American Church History Series, V. 5, pp. 401-402.

Among some of the most outstanding circuit riders were men who believed that the unity of the church could and should be preserved. They did not approve of slavery; rather they stoutly denounced it. Nevertheless, they considered slavery a lesser evil than would be the case with a divided church. They had worked to build a unified church; now they were reluctant to see it rent asunder. In this school of thought were to be found such men as Peter Cartwright, who expressed his position thus:

"It seemed to me that I could not survive under the painful fact that the Methodist Church must be divided, and all the time of the protracted debates I knew, if the southern preachers failed to carry the point they had fixed, namely, the tolerance of slaveholding in the Episcopacy, that they would fly the track, and set up for themselves. And in that event, many souls would be injured, and perhaps turn back to perdition; and that war and strife would prevail among brethren that once were united as a brotherly band, and that they must of necessity become a slavery Church. And I the more deeply regretted it because any abomination sanctified by the priesthood, would take a firmer hold on the community, and that this very circumstance would the longer perpetuate the evil of slavery . ." 1

3. Proposed Solutions

One of the poorest solutions to this great issue was the proposal to free all the slaves and allow them complete liberty to go anywhere and to do just as they chose. In the North, especially in the New England states, this sentiment was quite general. To the North-

.

1. Cartwright, op. cit., p. 423.

erners, this method would have meant little loss of money, and they were eager to see slavery banished entirely.

But freeing of all slaves was not at all agreeable to the Southern Methodists. It would mean setting at liberty at one time over two hundred thousand black men, with all the economic loss and social upheaval that that action would involve.

There was suggested also another solution, to colonize the American Negro in Africa. This proposal also met strong opposition and was rejected. This disapproval was voiced, not only by the slave owners, but also by many of the slaves who had kind masters and who, because they were born in America, were reluctant to return to Africa, their parental home.

4. The Church Divided in 1844

During the opening sessions of the conference, the comments were peaceful, but when opportunity came accusation after accusation was hurled at the southern men. Among others a pointed indictment was made against Bishop James O. Andrew, because he possessed slaves. His reply as recorded by J. M. Buckley is given in full below:

"To the Committee on Episcopacy.

DEAR BRETHREN: In reply to your inquiry, I submit the following statement of all the facts bearing on my connection with slavery. Several years since an old lady of Augusta, Ga., bequeathed to me a mulatto girl,

in trust that I should take care of her until she should be nineteen years of age; that with her consent I should then send her to Liberia; and that, in case of her refusal, I should keep her and make her as free as the laws of the State of Georgia would permit. When the time arrived she refused to go to Liberia, and of her own choice remains legally my slave, although I derive no pecuniary profit from her. She continues to live in her own house on my lot, and has been and is at present at perfect liberty to go to a free State at her pleasure; but the laws of the State will not permit her emancipation, nor admit such deed of emancipation to record, and she refuses to leave the State. In her case, therefore, I have been made a slave-holder legally, but not with my own consent.

Secondly, about five years since the mother of my former wife left to her daughter, not to me, a negro boy; and, as my wife died without a will more than two years since, by the laws of the State he becomes legally my property. In this case, as in the former, emancipation is impracticable in the State; but he shall be at liberty to leave the State whenever I shall be satisfied that he is prepared to provide for himself, or I can have sufficient security that he will be protected and provided for in the place to which he may go. Thirdly, in the month of January last I married my present wife, she being at the time possessed of slaves, inherited from her former husband's estate, and belonging to her. Shortly after my marriage, being unwilling to become their owner, regarding them as strictly hers, and the law not permitting their emancipation, I secured them to her by a deed of trust.

It will be obvious to you, from the above statement of facts, that I have neither bought nor sold a slave; that in the only two instances in which I am legally a slave holder emancipation is impracticable. As to the servants owned by my wife, I have no legal responsibility in the premises, nor could my wife emancipate them if she desired to do so. I have thus plainly stated all the facts in the case, and submit the statement for the consideration of the General Conference.

Yours respectfully,
JAMES O. ANDREW" 1

Bishop Andrew's quiet response further incited

.

1. Buckley, op. cit., pp. 412-414.

the anger of the abolitionists, who now demanded that he resign from the episcopacy. To his own resignation Bishop Andrew would have assented readily, but the Southerners refused to hear of such an act. Instead, they rose in arms to defend their bishop. Suffice it to say, that by the end of the General Conference the abolitionists had prevailed on the conference floor. They, however, had not removed slavery from the church. On the contrary, they had split one of the most powerful churches in America, while the cause of the abolitionists was not the least bit aided.

The importance of this rupture in the Methodist Episcopal Church can be truly appreciated only when one notes that it divided the body almost equally north and south. It is fitting here to note that there has been only one major break since the break over slavery; this demonstrates the seriousness of this schism.

C. The Consequences of Schism

1. Bitterness

Theoretically the division of the Methodist Episcopal Church, North and South, was achieved with not too much bitterness, but in 1848 a subsequent crisis came at the Pittsburg General Conference. A Southern representative, Dr. Lovick Pierce, visited the Northern General Conference to express to them that:

" . . . his church desired to maintain 'at all times a warm, confiding, and fraternal relation to each other'. This communication was referred to a committee, which, after due deliberation, reported: 'That, while we tender to the Rev. Dr. Pierce all personal courtesies, and invite him to attend our sessions, this General Conference does not consider it proper at present to enter into fraternal relations with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South'." 1

Dr. Pierce, rebuffed and chagrined over the resolution from the conference, refused to enter the "bar" of the conference and added that his church could never renew an offer of fraternal relationship between the two Wesleyan bodies.

Furthermore, with him had come men who hoped to accomplish a peaceful settlement in behalf of books, publishing equipment, and other property jointly owned by the Methodists, North and South. Since the North refused to entertain any such devision of church property, the Southern Church took the matter to court, and received several thousand dollars in settlement. Naturally, the South was jubilant, but this incident only served to strengthen the North in its position against slavery, and to further widen the breach between the already divided Church.

2. Subsequent Decline in Circuit Riding

It is well known that only in rare cases did

.

1. Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 257.

circuit riding exist at the time of the division of the Methodist Episcopal Church, North and South. After this major split, however, there were some cases in which the circuit rider continued to carry the Gospel message. In the North, probably the most prominent itinerant preacher whose evangelistic fervor remained constant was Peter Cartwright. In the South, circuit riding was still continued on a very small scale. Although by this period circuit riding was almost obsolete, a few riders from both the North and the South followed the Gold Rush to California in 1848 and 1849 and were able to establish several scattered churches along the coast.

3. Reasons for Decline

There are various reasons for this decline in circuit riding. One of the most vital reasons for this lapse was that an air of satisfaction prevailed among the pastors over past accomplishments; hence, a loss of vision existed in regard to the gigantic task still facing the Church. This lack of concern did not come all at once. Instead there had been a gradual cooling-off process on the part of the circuit riders, until revivals were not wanted and camp meetings were unwelcome.

Moreover, in contrast to the former firm anti-slavery stand of the Methodist Episcopal Church, slavery had come to be less obnoxious in the General Conference

gatherings; finally when the crisis came in the General Conference of 1844, it descended with a harsh lightning-like crash that tore the Church asunder. Subsequent to this unfortunate schism, affecting the entire membership, no one seemed inclined to return to circuit riding. All church interest and concern were centered upon the injury done; in this contention each side blamed the other, and sought reasons to justify its own position.

Another reason of great importance which contributed to the near extinction of the circuit rider was that the Methodist Episcopal Church was now enabled to build commodious, substantial, and often ornate churches where once the rough, hewn log cabins had stood. The so-called "Gilded Age" had emerged! As the initial cost and later upkeep of the church required money, men were welcomed into the church only if they possessed means. The Church became a middle-class institution. It was not a circuit rider who now nourished these flourishing churches, but rather, a regularly stationed pastor sent there by the annual conference.

4. The War

It was upon a nation split religiously over the question of slavery that the Civil War descended. The love for the lost had disappeared; circuit riding was no more; in place of the passion that drove the circuit rid-

er on was a spirit that could express itself in nothing less than war.

With the North so certain that it was doing the Lord's service, and so positive that the South was a group of rank sinners, it is noteworthy that in the Southern Army a very successful revival accompanied its march. This was not so in the North, where there was little interest in evangelism.

The Civil War made one definite contribution, viz., slavery was abolished within the confines of the United States. Political power, however, could not reunite the Church.

With the freedom of the Negro, a new problem challenged the minds and resources of every churchman. The Negroes who had once gone to church with their masters now were inclined to cease going to church just for the sake of testing their freedom.

Besides the problem of evangelizing the newly freed Negro, another critical problem faced the Church, viz., the education of over four million Negroes. The Church faced this two-fold task through a new organization called "The Freedmen's Aid Society". One author wrote on this subject:

"With the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States in December, 1865, slavery was gone forever. Four million slaves were set free, constituting just about one third of the population of the whole South. This emancipation

created one of the most formidable problems ever faced by any nation. The dimensions of the problem have only been clearly seen with the passage of years. These four million Negroes, hastily thrust into the responsibilities of citizenship, were almost entirely illiterate . . . The Methodist Episcopal Church was quick to see the need and respond to it. The command to 'cease firing' had hardly been given when steps were taken to provide a beginning in the establishment of schools for Negro education. On August 7, 1866, a meeting of laymen and ministers in Cincinnati, Ohio, called to consider 'the work of relief and education required in behalf of the freedman' resulted in the organization of the Freedmen's Aid Society. For sixty years this organization, now the Department of Education for Negroes . . . has carried on a far-reaching work of education among Negroes." 1

D. The Circuit Rider Moves to the West
and to the Foreign Field

1. Expansion into the West

Since the Civil War the evangelization of the home field has been rather neglected. Besides this neglected area of its life, it seems that no one has dared to attempt a general history of the Methodist Episcopal Church since its division, North and South, in 1844. In the words of Dr. James R. Joy:

"While a great deal of excellent historical work has been produced since Abel Stevens' monumental history of the M. E. Church, there has been no adequate and comprehensive treatment of the entire subject since 1840. The Methodist Protestant field has been well covered by Bassett and Drinkhouse and I believe that a definitive work on Southern Methodism is projected." 2

.

1. Luccock and Hutchinson, op. cit., pp. 443-444.
2. Dr. James R. Joy was editor of the Christian Advocate, official organ of the Methodist Episcopal Church, between the years of 1915 and 1936. He is now retired and is Librarian of the Methodist Historical Library, 150 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Even though extensive evangelization was neglected after 1844, a few local records indicate the manner of the winning of the West. One such account is found in the autobiography of Dr. H. D. Fischer. At the time of the Civil War Dr. Fischer was serving a pastorate - not a circuit - in Kansas. The reader will at once note the change from the old style circuit riding to the pastor who was settled on a pastorate. He was more like the one-time local preacher than the circuit rider. In quoting from his autobiography, this account is cited:

"At the close of my second year's pastorate at Marysville, we were assigned the station of Wamego, on the Union Pacific railroad, and here we spent two delightful and profitable years of service. During our residence at Wamego we had a number of successful protracted meetings." ¹

The above quotation suggests something of circuit riding, for the West, as Kansas knew it, had previously yielded to the Gospel; the circuit rider had moved on, and now a stationed pastor served this one community in place of the large circuit.

Circuit riding was further modified in some places. Utah was a fine example of this adaptation. On January 8, 1869 the Central Pacific coming from the West met the Union Pacific Railroad coming from Omaha, Nebraska near the Great Salt Lake, Utah. What once had been a

.

1. H. D. Fischer: Gun and the Gospel, Second Edition, p. 313.

Mormon colony became infiltrated with men of all faiths. Among the first to come was the Methodist preacher, but this time he did not come as a circuit rider, but rather as a preacher and teacher. Henry Martin Merkel made this comment concerning evangelization in Utah: "Soon after the completion of the railroad in 1869 came the Methodist pioneer missionaries as well as missionaries of other branches of the Christian Church." ¹ This effort of the Methodists in Utah proved so successful that before long some of the Mormon children were attending the Methodist schools, because they felt they received better education there.

Another account of a still different type of circuit riding, as it existed in back-wood and sparsely settled areas, is to be found in the biography of Peter Van Dorn who worked a small circuit with a radius of less than fifty miles in Kentucky in 1870. Peter's equipment like that of his predecessors was very scanty. He wrote of being given a horse with which to travel his circuit. Of his equipment for this first circuit, he wrote:

"Her name was 'Queen', and a queen she truly was from her tiny pointed ears to her slender hocks.
'You'll need her where you're goin', son, so take her and take care of her, and God take care of you both,'

.

1. Henry Martin Merkel: History of Methodism in Utah, p. 48.

Deacon Pruitt added, fervently.
Proud indeed was Peter Van Dorn, setting forth on
'Queen', possessed of a preacher's license, a circuit
to ride, and his 'library': a well-worn Bible, a copy
of the Methodist Discipline, and a much-thumbed volume
of that grand old poem, Holland's Bitter-Sweet." 1

He then described the circuit he rode which was: "Three
miles from Pruitt's to Block House, eight miles to Smith's
Chapel, twelve miles to Elkhorn, and twenty miles to Salem
on Tennessee Ridge - . . ." 2

As one reads this account he is reminded more of
the work of the one-time local preacher than of the cir-
cuit rider. Peter was a man who was confined to a local
area only. In this community of Kentucky feudists, Peter
seemed to have won the respect of the entire group, but
his ministry was rather uneventful, for he recorded no re-
vivals, no accessions to the church, and no district gath-
erings. The absence of these spiritual emphases seems
indicative of a definite lack in the ministry of this
young preacher of the '70's.

Each of these three citations of Methodist min-
istry after the Civil War suggests not only a varied adap-
tation of circuit rider methods, but it also indicates a
different spiritual tone from that which was shown in the
previous periods. Circuit riding was almost non-existent;

.

1. John Young Leming: Experiences of the Circuit Rider,
p. 12.
2. Ibid.

hundreds of regular preachers were appointed to pastorates displaying respectable churches; various types of schools were established and maintained; the old evangelistic fervor was gone.

Concerning this spiritually decadent period, Sweet writes as follows:

① "If FRANCIS ASBURY could have returned to life in the year 1880, he would have contemplated American Methodism with mixed emotions. He would have witnessed in Methodism the most evenly distributed church in the land and would have recognized in that fact the triumph of the circuit system for which he in so large a measure was responsible. From Ohio westward to the Pacific Coast, and from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico he would have found a Methodist church established in almost every county seat town, as well as in every considerable village and at innumerable country crossroads. He would have seen preachers in the newer sections of the land still riding large circuits, much as they had done in his day, but, on the other hand, he would have found in the cities and larger towns an increasing number of stationed preachers. There were now many 'splendid' churches; in which, according to Alfred Brunson, 'the people praised God by proxy, having quartets, choirs, and musical machines to do it for them, instead of doing it directly themselves.' In such churches the class meeting was rapidly dying out, for with the coming of the stationed preacher and weekly services such an official as the class leader was soon found to be in a large degree superfluous . . . The gradual dying out of the class meeting was naturally attended by the sorrowful complaints of the older generation, who saw in its disappearance not only an indication of a decline in vital religion but also a sure sign that Methodism itself was rapidly approaching the 'rocks'. Many of the old camp-meeting grounds, with which the pioneer bishop was so familiar, were still in use, but the rows of tents were rapidly giving place to streets of frame cottages, and instead of the old-time camp-meeting revival, the religious services were now interspersed with lectures on semi-religious and even secular subjects . . . In fact, many of the old-time camp-meeting grounds were rapidly being

transformed into respectable middle-class summer resorts with only a tinge of religion." 1

2. The Use of Circuit Rider Methods in the Foreign Field

It is in pioneer areas that the circuit rider of today is in his element. And certainly no place is more entirely a pioneer area than is the mission field. Here in these benighted regions the circuit rider has gone under the title of missionary. Here he is required to tour large areas in a minimum of time. This modern use of circuit riding on the mission field would be a study in itself. This thesis does not purpose to completely study all the ways in which it has been used throughout the world. Two good examples, however, may be taken from Latin and South America and Alaska, which represent the efforts of several denominations.

a. In Latin and South America

One author in describing this missionary circuit of Latin America has written:

"Measured by any standard our Latin American circuit is a large one. It includes ten countries which have a combined area of 8,687,077 square miles, 213 times that of the state of Ohio. Even Asbury would call that a big circuit. In six months of travel in 1941-42 we were able to see much, but by no means all, of Methodist work in this vast area." 2

.

1. Sweet, Methodism in American History, pp. 332-333.
2. Elizabeth M. Lee and Alfred W. Wasson: The Latin American Circuit, p. 5.

To quote again from the same author:

"Bishop Holt's position is unique. He is assigned to visit the Methodist work in Mexico, Central and South America, while his administrative duties are limited to Annual Conferences in the United States." ¹

It is readily seen from the above comments that the work of the modern circuit rider has new means of transportation unheard of in the time of Asbury. Though the means of travel differ widely from those used in days gone by, still the method remains unchanged and unchangeable in covering large territories with the Gospel message.

The goal in all of these countries is an indigenous church. To achieve this goal, the circuit rider is dependent upon the wealth of the fertile soil, the society already established, and a rapidly expanding educational program. The greatest opposition to Protestant mission work in Central and South America has been the Roman Catholic Church. They have access to the use of both the parochial school and the radio to combat any Protestant evangelization.

In addition to these problems, there are economic difficulties to be overcome in many of the countries. Far more developed nations own or rather operate the oil wells, the cotton farms and the mining industry. As a

.

1. Ibid., p. 6.

result the missionary is under suspicion when he comes with the new Gospel.

The Gospel, however, is making progress especially among the youth in these areas. There is always a long waiting list - a list of those who want to enter the grammar or high schools. Some of those who go to the school of the modern circuit rider remain nominally Catholic in keeping with the family tradition, but one great change has been effected - the Bible is now in their hands, and has become their supreme authority. Concerning one of the schools, one has written an account of the American Institute in La Paz:

"This school was founded in 1907. It numbers among its alumni the present Rector of the University in the capital, three of the leading physicians and many of the successful lawyers, journalists and business men of the country. In 1941 the student body numbered 319 boys, 144 girls, total 463 of whom 52 were boarding students. At the time of our visit there were in the school three missionary couples, two single men, two single women and one retired missionary who is on a pension from the Board. It has land, buildings and equipment valued at \$165,000. It receives from the Board an annual subsidy of \$450, and the Board pays the salary and travel of missionaries when on furlough and makes some payments on salary while they are in Bolivia." 1

b. In Alaska

Chaplain Lundberg, who was stationed in Alaska during the recent war, has written concerning circuit

.

1. Ibid., p. 37.

rider methods in twentieth century Alaska:

"Alaska today because of its huge distances (twice the size of Texas) and its small population (around a hundred thousand) is still dependent for its Christian ministry on the circuit type of a missionary. Outside of the three large cities of Alaska, Juneau, Anchorage, and Fairbanks, most settlements are only hamlets and separated by great distances. Even the so-called cities of Alaska have populations of only five thousand or so. These cities, if anything, have an abundance of clergy and missionaries.

"There are many types of ministry in Alaska. The city ministry does not differ from that in the states, except that the city populations in Alaska are very lacking in stability and community loyalty. In the 'bush' and that is the wilderness, the ministers and missionaries work among the (1) American-Europeans and the (2) Eskimoes, Indians, and Aleuts. In both cases, the minister must travel great distances.

"To travel, the missionary employs (1) waterways, (2) trails, (3) highways, and (4) airways. Waterways are the most ancient of highways in a wilderness, and a great deal of missionary traveling is done by boat or barge in the summertime. Trails are also used, mostly during the winter, when the ground is frozen solid, covered with snow, and suitable for travel by dog sleds. Highways, though few in numbers, were rapidly and greatly extended and multiplied during the recent war, notably the Alcan Highway (1600 miles) and the Canol Highway (800 miles). Of late years, the territory has developed suitable transportation by air, and in many ways is more dependent on air travel than American communities . . . most priests and ministers have flown by means of the many small commercial lines in the north. Since so much time is consumed in travel by boat or dog team, the advantages of travel by air are obvious.

"Organization is essential for covering this area. Since the people served can seldom support a missionary or priest, the independent missionary is forced to stay in the cities. Only these churches have had a continuous and adequate ministry: Protestant Episcopal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and Russian Orthodox. Churches organized on the episcopal system have more staying power it seems, and the Presbyterian church, in many places a pioneer, has been retreating to the

cities.

"Since the natives, Indians, Eskimoes and Aleuts, are basically nomadic people, and the American Europeans are dependent on trapping, mining, and fishing, the burden of the Christian ministry falls on the man who is willing to undertake the circuit type of a ministry. Unfortunately Alaska is in the news and American mission boards will keep sending city-bred men to the already crowded cities. Church work in the cities is a competitive affair in Alaska, and despite the brave efforts of a handful of 'bush' preachers and priests, the needs of Alaska are not being met." 1

E. Summary

This chapter has indicated the almost total absence of any emphasis upon circuit riding in the years immediately preceding and following the Civil War. It has suggested the possibility of a church over-emphasizing some humanitarian issue to the exclusion of the great task left by the Master. From the present vantage point of nearly a hundred years, it seems that the slavery question should have been settled in a more Christian way within the church group, and the emphasis on circuit riding strengthened. Had this been done a division in the Methodist Episcopal Church might have been averted, and the circuit rider could have continued with his evangel-

.

1. Walter G. Lundberg, Army chaplain the Yukon Territory and Alaska from September, 1943 to October, 1945. Information on churches from Church of England in Canada bishop of the Yukon, Roman Catholic bishop co-adjutor of the Yukon, and Protestant Episcopal missionary bishop of Alaska.

istic work in America for a period of years with even
an added incentive.

CHAPTER V

GENERAL SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER V

GENERAL SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. General Summary

The foregoing discussion of the circuit rider has delineated the rise, growth and decline of the strongest evangelistic method known to American history.

The first chapter surveyed various attempts to evangelize these colonists. Without exception these attempts ended in failure or in a very limited degree of success. Even the Great Awakening with all of its religious excitement failed to leave any permanent results, and the spiritual condition of the colonists was worse than before the revival occurred. Just before the American Revolution, Methodism, which was the last of these groups, was introduced, but its initial success, like that of the others, was likewise meagre.

The second chapter, however, shows a marked change in Methodism with the introduction of circuit riding, which was organized under Francis Asbury, a genius at administration. Under him these itinerant Methodist preachers rode out their lives for Christ. He, along with his humblest preacher, rode the circuits in all kinds of weather, and the Methodist Episcopal Church at the time of the

death of Asbury numbered over two hundred thousand.

The next period, 1816-1844, was destined to see an even more unbelievable growth. Chapter three was a study of the institutions of the Methodists. In it the camp meeting, the class meeting, the revival, and other assets of Methodism were discussed.

Chapter four suggested the intense feeling over slavery which resulted in a divided church. It told of the decline and premature death of American circuit riding. And it also indicated the changed interest in evangelization which moved from the home field to the mission compound.

1. The Strong Points of the Circuit Rider

At its organization, Methodism planned a long-range program for church extension. Inherent within this plan was the provision that Asbury use young men to organize and to ride the first American circuits. It has been indicated that he was a keen student of personality and a powerful administrator. It does not appear that his use of young men was due to a desire to give vital church activity to young, growing, Christian men. Nevertheless, it served for that end, and it resulted in a strong group of circuit riders.

The following are some of the outstanding characteristics of the circuit rider:

- a. He maintained a strong, clear, personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
- b. He was a man with a consistent and vital prayer life.
- c. He considered the Gospel the only way of salvation, and ever sought to bring men unto Christ through the preaching of the Word.
- d. His faithfulness to duty was exemplary; he, for the most part, was obedient to his church and to his God.
- e. He was self-less and unselfish.
- f. He was an administrator, for

He conducted membership training courses;

He inspired personal evangelistic work among his members;

He purged his class in love but in firmness; and

He used his laity, local preachers and class leaders, to spread the Gospel.

- g. He carried the Gospel to the frontier until Methodism had spread throughout the United States.

2. Weakness of the Circuit Rider

That the circuit rider of the Methodist Episcopal Church was remarkably intrepid, the past chapters have shown. But even so, he possessed weaknesses which hindered, and finally sorely crippled this church which he had served so faithfully.

In the ranks of the early circuit rider, a common weakness prevailed, viz., his lack of education. This

fault among the pioneer circuit rider was largely irremediable, for in most cases he went into communities ahead of the schools. Naturally this lack of schooling accounted for uncouth mannerisms.

Again, among later circuit riders there were many who had a lenient attitude toward slavery; some even held slaves. Since slave holding was sanctioned by the ministry, many church members were encouraged to expand slavery. As a result the church split, North and South, over the slavery question in 1844.

There was still another weakness prevalent among the later circuit riders, which was perhaps the most dangerous of all. They became smug over past accomplishments, and they neglected the vital religious program which had characterized the ministry of their predecessors.

3. His Major Contributions

Among the major contributions of the circuit rider to American Christianity are the following:

- a. Religious needs of Colonial America met with a large degree of success;
- b. Well-established Wesleyan church throughout the United States;
- c. Beginnings of a strong educational program and of a well-established publishing house;
- d. The important example of sacrificial, Christian

leadership;

- e. An important example of a definitely vital total church program;
- f. The strong leadership in evangelism through sixty consecutive years.

Regarding this Methodist Church, which was so well begun by the circuit rider, one has summarized its present day strength as follows:

"The most obvious legacy of the Evangelical Revival to the United States is the 'united' Methodist Church. Apart from its many adherents, that Church today has nearly 8,000,000 active members. Its places of worship number 48,000, and its ordained ministers and missionaries 26,200. In its Sunday Schools, staffed by 560,000 voluntary officers and teachers, it regularly imparts Bible, moral and religious instruction to nearly 6,000,000 children. Its Epworth Leagues have 820,000 young people in various stages of training for Christian Endeavor. Its foreign missionary efforts - including medical and educational - reach out to every Continent; while within the United States, its influence is enormous. In the sphere of higher education, it controls famous universities, colleges, professional schools and vocational institutes, with a faculty, in 1941, totalling over 6,000, and a student body of 110,000. The properties committed to this higher educational work are valued at over \$150,000,000, and its endowments exceed \$160,000,000. That Church's hospitals, old age homes, orphanages and co-related institutions, moreover, are hardly less imposing, representing, as they do, an estate of \$110,000,000, and caring annually for some 350,000 persons. The entire properties of the Methodist Church, including its foreign field equipment, are valued at over \$1,500,000,000: while in 1940, notwithstanding the pinch of prolonged depression, nearly \$80,000,000 was bestowed by loyal supporters upon this great voluntary Christian Communion." 1

.

1. Bready, op. cit., pp. 316-317.

B. Recommendations

As the early circuit riders found their lay assistants invaluable, just so the early preachers in the author's own church, The Free Methodist Church, highly prized their local preacher and exhorters. But at the present time, the offices of Local Preacher and Exhorter have become largely honorary instead of useful ones. Within the church discipline, a course is still listed for the benefit of the local preacher, but these studies are largely neglected; hence, this area of contribution is lacking in the church. Many others of the laity, too, are not too well instructed in the Bible, church doctrine, or the church program.

In view of this situation, the author would like to make the following recommendations:

- a. A thorough emphasis in the church program for the education of both the local preacher and the exhorter.
- b. Careful planning by the church, under the guidance of the pastor, for definite projects to be carried on by both of these lay officers.
- c. At least one Bible study per week, fashioned insofar as is possible according to some well-planned method such as that taught at the Biblical Seminary in New York. This should be held in the home of one of the members with the expectation that as interest in these Bible studies grows, the church would be

enabled to reach out into the homes within the community. One of the church members, chosen by the pastor, would be responsible for making these contacts.

- d. A strong emphasis upon membership training as follows:

The study of the Discipline; acquaintance with the total work of the church - its missions and educational program; the regular use of the Means of Grace such as attendance at church services, prayer-meetings, class meetings, vital private and family devotions, and quarterly meetings and camp meetings.

All these recommendations are in full accordance with the purposes of the Methodist Church as can be seen from this present study. It was to become acquainted with the origins of the Wesleyan movement in America - its purposes, ideals, and methods for the Kingdom's work - that the writer undertook this study. It is believed by this writer that these suggestions, in addition to the already existing church program, will enlist many of the laity in an evangelistic effort that will bear fruit for the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Primary Sources

- Asbury, Francis: Journal of Reverend Francis Asbury. Volumes I, II, and III. Eaton and Mains, New York, 1821.
- Cartwright, Peter: Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, the Backwoods Preacher, edited by W. P. Strickland. Jennings and Graham, Cincinnati, 1856.
- Chase, Abner: Recollections of the Past. Methodist Episcopal Publishing House, New York, 1848.
- Creighton, Joseph H.: Life and Times of J. H. Creighton. Western Methodist Book Concern, Cincinnati, Copyright, 1899.
- Erwin, James: Reminiscences of Early Circuit Life. Spear, Johnson and Company, Toledo, 1884.
- Finley, James B.: Autobiography of James B. Finley, or Pioneer Life in the West, edited by W. P. Strickland. The Methodist Book Concern, Cincinnati, 1856.
- Fischer, H. D.: Gun and the Gospel. Second Edition. Medical Century Company, Toledo, 1899.
- Giles, Charles: Pioneer, A Narrative of the Nativity, Experience, Travels and Ministerial Labors of Reverend Charles Giles. G. Lane and P. P. Sandford, New York, 1844.
- Hobart, Chauncey: Recollections of My Life. Red Wing Printing Company, Red Wing, Minnesota, 1885.
- Hudson, John B.: Narrative of the Christian Experience, Travel, and Labors of John B. Hudson. William Alling, Rochester, 1838.
- Leming, John Young: Experiences of the Circuit Rider. Methodist Book Concern, New York, 1932.
- Mecklenburg, George: The Last of the Old West. The Capitol Book Company, Washington, D. C., 1927.

Merkel, Henry Martin: The History of Methodism in Utah. Dentan Publishing Company, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 1938.

Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America, From 1773 to 1794, Inclusive. Henry Tuckniss, printer and sold by: John Dickens, Philadelphia, 1794.

Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America, From 1773 to 1813, Inclusive, Volume I. Published by: Daniel Hitt and Thomas Ware, New York, 1813.

Osborn, Elbert: Autobiography of Elbert Osborn. Methodist Episcopal Publishing House, New York, Copyright 1847.

Tucker, Mrs. T. W.: Itinerant Preaching in the Early Days of Methodism. B. B. Russell, Boston, 1872.

Wakeley, J. B.: The Bold Frontier Preacher. Hitchcock and Walden, Cincinnati, 1869.

Waugh, Lorenzo: Autobiography of Lorenzo Waugh. Fifth Edition. Methodist Book Concern, San Francisco, 1896.

Wesley, John: Wesley His Own Biographer, or Selections from the Journals of the Reverend John Wesley, A.M. C. H. Kelly, London, 1891.

Young, Jacob: Autobiography of a Pioneer. Cranston and Curts, Cincinnati, 1857.

B. Secondary Sources

Asbury, Herbert: A Methodist Saint, A Life of Bishop Asbury. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1927.

Bangs, Nathan: The Life of Freeborn Garrettson. Fourth Edition. Methodist Publishing House, New York, 1838.

Bates, Ernest Sutherland: American Faith. W. W. Norton and Company, Incorporated, New York, 1940.

Bready, J. Wesley: This Freedom-Whence? Revised Edition. American Tract Society, New York, 1943.

Briggs, Frederick W.: Bishop Asbury. Wesleyan Conference Office, London, No date.

Buckley, J. M.: A History of Methodists in the United States. Fourth Edition. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1900.

Christian Advocate, Official Organ of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Methodist Publishing House, New York.

Conant, William C.: Narratives of Remarkable Conversions and Revival Incidents. Derby and Jackson, New York, 1858.

Culbreath, J. M.: Studies in Methodist History. Cokesbury Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 1925.

Davenport, Frederick Morgan: Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals. The Macmillan Company, New York, 1905.

DuBose, Horace M.: A History of Methodism, 1884-1916. Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Nashville, 1916.

Fish, Henry C.: Handbook of Revivals. James H. Earle, Boston, 1874.

Garber, Paul Neff: The Methodist Meeting House. Board of Missions and Church Extension. The Methodist Church, New York, 1941.

Hibbens, W. W.: Reverend James Havens, One of the Heroes of Indiana Methodism. Sentinel Company, Indianapolis, 1872.

Hoss, E. E.: William McKendree. Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Nashville, Tennessee, 1914.

Janes, Edwin L.: The Character and Career of Francis Asbury. Carlton and Lanahan, New York, 1872.

Lee, Elizabeth M. and Wasson, Alfred W.: The Latin-American Circuit. Board of Missions and Church Extension, The Methodist Church, New York, 1942.

Lee, James W.: The Illustrated History of Methodism. Methodist Periodical Publishing Company, New York, 1900.

- Lee, LeRoy M.: Life and Times of Jesse Lee. Southern Methodist Publishing House, Nashville, 1860.
- Luccock, Halford E. and Hutchinson, Paul: The Story of Methodism. The Methodist Book Concern, New York, 1926.
- Lundberg, Walter G.: Circuit in Alaska, Article written February, 1947 especially for this thesis.
- McTyeire, Holland N.: A History of Methodism. Southern Methodist Publishing House, Nashville, 1884.
- M'Lean, John: Sketch of Reverend Philip Gatch. Western Methodist Publishing House, Cincinnati, Swormstedt and Poe - publishing agents, 1854.
- Paddock, Z.: Memoir of B. G. Paddock. Nelson and Phillips, New York, Copyright 1875.
- Rupp, I. Daniel: An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in the United States. J. Y. Humphreys, Philadelphia, 1844.
- Simmons, J. C.: The History of Southern Methodism on the West Coast. Southern Methodist Publishing House, Nashville, 1886.
- Stevens, Abel: A Compendious History of American Methodism. Carlton and Porter, New York, 1867.
- Stevenson, E.: Reverend Valentine Cook. Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Publishing Company, Nashville, 1858.
- Strickland, W. P.: The Life and Times of Francis Asbury. Carlton and Porter, New York, 1858.
- Sweet, William Warren: Circuit-Rider Days in Indiana. W. K. Stewart and Company, Indianapolis, 1916.
- Circuit-Rider Days Along the Ohio. The Methodist Book Concern, New York, 1923.
- Indiana Asbury-DePauw University, 1837-1937. The Abingdon Press, New York, 1937.
- Makers of Christianity. Henry Holt and Company, Incorporated, New York, 1937.

Sweet, William Warren: Methodism in American History. The Book Concern, New York, 1933.

Our American Churches. The Methodist Book Concern, New York, 1924.

Religion in Colonial America. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1942.

Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1840. Volume IV, The Methodists. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1946.

Revivalism in America, Its Origin, Growth and Decline. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1945.

The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War. The Methodist Book Concern, Cincinnati, 1912.

The Rise of Methodism in the West being the Journal of the Western Conference 1800-1811. The Methodist Book Concern, New York, 1920.

The Story of Religions in America. Harper and Brothers Publishers, New York, 1930.

Tipple, Ezra Squier: Francis Asbury, the Prophet of the Long Road. The Methodist Book Concern, New York, 1916.

The Heart of Asbury's Journal. Eaton and Mains, New York, 1904.

Wakeley, J. B.: Lost Chapters Recovered from the Early History of American Methodism. Wilbur B. Ketcham, New York, 1889.

Walker, Williston: The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1893.

World Outlook, Periodical. Published by the Methodist Publishing House, N. Y., N. Y.