Methodism in the Northern Tier –
Some Bits of History
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of the Williamsport District Ministerial Association
at Old Burlington Church, Bradford County

My assignment from the program committee was not to prepare a history of the northern portion of the Williamsport District of the Central Pennsylvania Conference. Such a paper would contain voluminous statistics, most of them dry and uninteresting, even though valuable for historical study. The particular occasion for this paper at this time, I take it, is to stimulate some interest in preserving our historical data and in getting our local churches to plan for the Bicentennial of American Methodism in 1966.

Too many of our so-called church anniversaries have only been anniversaries of church buildings, and the average history of a local church mentions almost exclusively material improvements to the buildings and the list of pastors it has had. In each case the church is a fellowship of persons whose history antedates and out-shines the story of their church buildings. Of course, most of these things have never been written down, with the result that we do not have church histories really – only church building histories. This can hardly be helped, and the history of church buildings themselves is very interesting as far as it goes.

Let us begin with some highlights of the history of Methodism at this spot on which we are assembled. The building is a living symbol of Methodism’s missionary and church-building policy. This edifice was erected here in 1822 – the third structure used by the Methodists on this plot of ground – and is now the oldest church building in Bradford County. It is also probably the only remaining example of this particular type of church architecture within the bounds of our conference. It was erected here because this was the central place for Methodists in Sugar Creek, but by 1857 the settlements at Burlington and West Burlington had been made. The people living there then built meeting houses more to their own needs at that time, abandoning this meeting house as a regular preaching place after only thirty-five years of regular use. Methodist preachers always went where the people were. This building had served its purpose and others took its place. It should be said, however, that there has been an annual service held in this old church ever since it was not used as a circuit preaching place.

Thus, this building is not only a symbol of the glory of a shining past, but a symbol of the importance of change and of the adaptability of our fathers to new circumstances. This kind of pulpit, by the way, was not uncommon in Methodist churches in that day. The first church on Pine Street in Williamsport “had a high
pulpit built up at the rear of the church (between the entrance doors), with steps leading up to it, after the architecture of the day, and was so very high that a child could not see the preacher when he was in it, until he stood up to preach.” I call your attention to the fact that this is an octagonal pulpit, as most modern pulpits are, symbolizing the eight beatitudes of Jesus (Matthew 5), or the eight offices of the ministry (Ephesians 4). Other denominations called this a “wine glass pulpit” because of its shape, but Methodists usually didn’t.

Like others of its day this church was built according to the Disciplinary rule, “Let all our churches be plain and decent, but not more expensive than is absolutely necessary; otherwise the necessity of raising money will make rich men necessary to us. But if so, we must be dependent on them, yea, and governed by them. And then farewell to Methodist discipline, if not doctrine too.” This paragraph appeared in all editions of the Discipline from Francis Asbury’s day and for almost one hundred years. Methodists were not like Quakers in insisting on plainness, but they were social radicals and insisted on keeping themselves “unspotted from the world.”

But Methodist polity has always changed over time. And customs change, too. Back on November 2, 1842, a letter to the editor appeared in The Christian Herald concerning the proper posture for pronouncing and receiving the benediction. Let me quote part of it. The inquirer, signing himself “Uniformity,” says

Generally the benediction follows prayer with the preacher and people kneeling. This is the way the bishops and preachers usually do. I suppose this to be right. But of late I have visited Methodist congregations where the preacher, on closing the prayer, has suddenly popped up from behind the sacred desk, as from the dome of St. Peter’s, throwing forth his hand to the congregation, who have as suddenly rushed to their feet to receive the expected benediction. Now, Mr. Editor, it appears to me to be a little more Protestant to pronounce the benediction, when preceded by prayer, upon the knees and as a prayer – and in the use of the first person plural “us” instead of “you.” What think you, Doctor? Please give us your opinion.

Unless you think in terms of a high pulpit like this, you cannot understand “Uniformity’s” picturesque description. By the way, the editor, Dr. Bond, replied like this:

The peace and unity of the church has been so disturbed and broken up by the many attempts to produce uniformity in matters of doctrine and forms of worship, that we have no disposition to enter the controversy... If we were to do so, we would ask the question in a different form. “Should the people stand or sit down, as kneeling during any part of public worship is going out of fashion in both the north and in the east?”

The history of this society at Burlington goes back to 1791, the year that the first class was formed at Amariah Suttons’s on the Lycoming, and the year in which John Wesley died. In that year the wives of some of the first settlers started to have regular prayer meetings among themselves, which continued for
several years before any circuit preacher began to hold services regularly. There is an interesting account that one day a group of young people got together for a frolic and staged a mock prayer meeting, making fun of their mothers, as a form of amusement. They sang hymns, read scripture and had several prayers, when suddenly the seriousness of their so-called amusement struck them with a sense of shame and they became convinced of their sin. Their mothers, instead of rebuking them, wisely came to join them in their prayer meeting, and several were converted. No date is given for this event, and no preacher was there to guide it, but it seems like a good beginning for a church. At that period of our history not more than one in ten of the population was a church member, and the population of this frontier was very sparse. The men later came to be the active leaders, but the women started the church.

As in most of these northern tier settlements, the majority of the original settlers were veterans of the Revolutionary War – many of them having been officers who received grants of land for their war service. Others bought land from the Connecticut Company, which had claimed the upper third of Pennsylvania as a part of the state of Connecticut by a grant which they held to have precedence over the one of William Penn. While many settlers came from southern Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware, a large number were true “Connecticut Yankees” – and this accounts for the New England style of their villages, their homes, and their churches. It also accounts for many of their characteristics and usages, which are quite distinct from those of the Pennsylvania Germans of the southern and central parts of the state and the conference.

They were stern, liberty-loving, independent, thrifty, honorable people, and their descendents retain many of these traits today. In 1792, however, William Colbert, the first itinerant assigned to the Tioga circuit, would not have given them so much praise as a group. He had come into contact with the wild, primitive lifestyle of the earliest settlers in their crude one-room log cabins, and he was depressed at the response he got here at first. But many men who later achieved distinction were settlers in this part of our conference.

In this churchyard, for example, rests the body of General Samuel McKean, who was the 19th United States Senator from Pennsylvania. His family came from Maryland and may have been Methodists when they arrived here. Samuel was a lawyer, and probably the most influential citizen of the community in his day. Because of his leadership, this church obtained its charter as “The Methodist Church of Burlington” in 1796. I know of no other charter issued as early as this to any other Methodist Society in our conference. His relative William McKe an was the carpenter who built the pulpit of this church, and probably supervised construction of the edifice. For a period of over fifty years, most of the class leaders here had the surname McKean – and several were local preachers, and one was an itinerant.

When the Tioga circuit was formed in 1792, it covered all the territory west of the Wyoming Valley – including most of present Bradford, Sullivan and Tioga counties in Pennsylvania and on up into the Seneca and Cayuga Lake
country in New York state. Colbert called it a very cold, dismal and poor territory with few settlers – and most of them poverty-stricken. The rich Genesee country had not been fully opened up as yet. He said he had only three converts while he was here – but that was only for about four months, in late 1792 and early 1793. He speaks well of Brother Campbell and Stephen Ballard, of Sugar Creek, at whose houses he was welcomed. In 1804, when he was presiding elder of the district, he led the first quarterly meeting ever held at this spot. Andrew McKean was the class leader and exhorter at that time.

It is interesting to note that when this territory was taken from Central New York Conference and placed in the Williamsport District of Central Pennsylvania Conference, it was not the first time that these different sections were in the same district. Let me set out a few dates and arrangements of circuits from past presiding elder districts.

- In 1794, Thornton Fleming was presiding elder here with only three circuits in his district. But these three circuits were Tioga, Seneca (Lake) and Nova Scotia – to which latter circuit eight preachers had been appointed. Fleming had only 12 quarterly meetings to hold in a whole year, BUT…
- In 1796, Thomas Ware was presiding elder here with eight circuits: Philadelphia, Chester, Bristol, Wilmington, Strasburgh, Northumberland, Wyoming and Seneca. This included the state of Delaware, a large part of Pennsylvania, and New York. Ware had 32 quarterly meeting to attend, BUT…
- In 1801, the districts were more formally organized – and named. Northumberland and Wyoming circuits were in the Philadelphia District, with the state of Delaware and four other circuits. Tioga and Seneca were in the Albany District.

The Susquehanna District was formed in 1803, and was in Philadelphia Conference. By 1805, Susquehanna District was in Baltimore Conference and had “The Wyoming Blacksmith” Anning Owen as presiding elder. He had only seven circuits, which meant 28 quarterly meetings – but camp-meetings were now starting to be held, and the presiding elder was also expected to be present and participate in them. The seven circuits were Wyoming, Northumberland, Carlisle, Huntington, Littleton, Juniata and Tioga. This was essentially all the Methodist work established by then within the boundaries of the present Central Pennsylvania and Wyoming conferences. This was all one district, and one that remained intact for a number of years.

In 1810 Genesee Conference was formed, and the existing Susquehanna District became part of it. This included the following ten circuits: Lyons (NY, where Genesee Conference was organized that year), Ontario (Ontario County NY), Holland Lands, Canisteo, Lycoming, Northumberland, Wyoming, Canaan, Tioga and Seneca. The new conference also had two districts in Canada – Upper and Lower. One of the men sent to Upper Canada in 1812 was John Rhoads, who had been a very well known member of Baltimore Conference. He did yeoman
service on all the circuits, but when the War of 1812 broke out he was not allowed to return to the United States. When he was able to return in 1817, he was assigned Lycoming Circuit – even though he was no longer single, for Rhoads had found a wife and married while he was interned in Canada. But Bishop Asbury had died in 1816, and the other bishops did not insist that Rhoads locate. What Asbury would have required of this married preacher one does not know. John Rhoads finally retired and lived at Milton, until he died in 1842 of full years and great honor.

The Rev. George Harmon was presiding elder of the Susquehanna District in 1812, and for two years thereafter. Toward the close of his life he wrote the following about the district.

*It commenced on the south end, about 100 miles north of Baltimore. It extended north to within 20 miles of Utica, in the state of New York – and from the Delaware River on the east to the Genesee on the west. It was at least 1,000 miles around it. Such roads! Such mountains! Such hills! I broke down several horses during my term of service on this district.*

The greatest point of adventure and romance in the district was the Lycoming route between western New York and Williamsport, on the West Branch. Towanda Creek, Sugar Creek, and the Lycoming head nearly together – the former two emptying into the North Branch below Tioga, and the latter into the West Branch near Williamsport. From the head of the Lycoming to its mouth is about 30 miles, and one passing down its valley had to ford it 34 times. It is a deep and rapid stream, upon which small rafts of lumber were run in the spring. Mr. Harmon gives the following account of one of his perilous trips over this route.

*I held a quarterly meeting on the north part of my district, my next being on the south part. I had to pass through the sixty mile wilderness. I took what was called the Lycoming route. It was in winter, the snow being between two and three feet deep. I lodged all night at Spaulding’s Tavern, near the head of the Towanda. I started early the next morning and rode some eight miles to Brother Soper’s on the Lycoming and took breakfast. I then set out for Williamsport.*

*When I came to what was considered then the most dangerous crossing place on the route, I found the river frozen over about one third of the way on each side. The snow, as stated above, was from two to three feet deep, and no one had passed to open the road. I paused but for a minute. The sun had gone down. I could not go back to Brother Soper’s – some 10 to 15 miles – the last house I had passed. If I could cross, there was a log tavern within about one mile. I knew the greatest danger would be in getting on the ice on the other side – for should the ice break, I and my horse would both go under.*

*I must venture it. I saw no other course. I was on a very spirited and powerful horse. I urged him forward, and when his feet touched the bottom his head went under the water. As he arose on his hind feet, I put spurs into his flanks and he at once bounded off into the river. The river*
was so deep that it ran over the tops of my boots as I sat on his back. I got through without further difficulty.

When I reached the tavern my first care was to have my horse attended to. But when I attempted to take off my boots, they were frozen to my socks. I succeeded after a while in removing them. I had not long before read Dr. Rush on the use of spirituous liquors. That great man acknowledged that they had their use in certain cases, but there could be no case in which it would not be better to pour them in a swill pail, and put both feet in, than to drink them. I bought half a pint of rum and bathed myself with it. I slept comfortably and took no cold. But my poor horse! The fatigue of worrying through the snow, and so often fording the river, so affected his limbs that I had to part with him at great sacrifice.

These experiences show us something of the problems of the early presiding elders, but by no means all of them.

In this northern tier of Pennsylvania, there were many good Methodists who were opposed to bishops and presiding elders – and they did not hesitate to let them know it. This was the period of the establishment of the Methodist Protestant Church – with its emphasis on lay membership in conference, and no episcopacy to make autocratic decisions. Numerous such congregations were formed in Bradford and Tioga counties, and our churches here lost many good people. Later the Wesleyan Methodists were organized. They believed much the same as the Methodist Protestants, but they were radical about abolition of slavery and in disagreement over the General Conference’s reticence to declare slavery a moral evil. Many MP’s joined the Wesleyans, and they still have rather active churches in this area. When the Civil War brought the end to legalized slavery, the issue was not so hot and many of them, of both these dissident groups, came back to the mother church. They had never been disloyal to the spirit, the aims, or the doctrine of Methodism – but they had disagreed violently on polity.

Much has been written about the physical hardships of the circuit riders who had so much to endure on these early charges. Most of them did not complain. But not enough has been said about their difficulties and their controversies with their contemporary ministers of other and differing beliefs. In the central part of Pennsylvania they had to deal with Calvinism and the formalism of the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran and other denominations that were older than Methodism.

Wesley’s preachers were Arminian. Their gospel, which declared that Christ died for all men and that all who accepted him could be saved, was understood by the rough sinners among these uneducated pioneer settlers. They spent a great deal of their time showing up what they believed to be the fallacies of Calvinism. They did not always succeed, but they had a better batting average with the common sinners than many of their better educated clerical antagonists – who scored much better with the formally educated and already orthodox of a higher social standing. Naturally, the Calvinists did not take the Methodist attacks without defending themselves and their doctrines. Their retaliation was no
more gentle and kindly than the Methodists who had attacked them. The result was very often wildfire.

Here in Bradford and Tioga counties, the Baptists were much stronger than in Pennsylvania to the south. In addition to being decidedly Calvinist, they were independent in polity. They had come from the Roger Williams country of Connecticut and Rhode Island, so they were staunch in their stands for freedom from the supervision provided by a connectional church.

There was also another element here – Universalism. Their doctrine of universal salvation was not accepted by the Methodists, but it was based upon the belief that Christ died for all men and not for a pre-destined portion of mankind – and so our Methodist forefathers said they could rather agree with the Universalists than with the Baptists. The old Universalist church at Sheshequin is a building like this one, but more elegant in style, and it houses a congregation to this day. There are quite a few Universalists in this area at the present time, but the old controversies have died out in the spirit of respect for each other’s convictions.

Even so, there soon came to be a genuinely co-operative spirit among the different denominations in the work of saving souls. By 1840 it could be reported from Knoxville circuit, for example, that they had a protracted meeting with over 50 converts – especially favoring Mix-town and Westfield – and that there were 30 more converted at a union protracted meeting at Beacher Island with the Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists working together.

The circuit riders were primarily what they were called – “Methodist preachers.” The pastoral work was largely done by local preachers and class leaders. Too much cannot be said for the services of these consecrated people who visited the sick, reproved the erring, buried the dead, and comforted the bereaved – all while the “preacher in charge” was two or three weeks travel time distant. We know who some of them were in the earliest days.

The best known was Elisha Cole, whose father settled near Monroeton and cleared a large farm there shortly after the Revolutionary War. Father Cole had come from Connecticut and was a faithful Methodist, although Colbert says he was a little too much attracted to Universalism. But it was his son who left his name in the history of these parts. There was hardly a local church organized or built in those days but that had the services of and profited by the preaching of Elisha Cole. It is said that at one time he was the only resident preacher in the county.

What did Cole preach, and how did he do as a preacher? He did better than the average local preacher, for he had several years of work as an itinerant. But if he was a typical local preacher of that day, he did not rely upon his own sermons when filling a pulpit. Many a local preacher came to the service prepared, if the preacher scheduled did not arrive, to read one of Wesley’s sermons to the congregation.

One local preacher who did just that, and who also erected a log schoolhouse and a church, was a man who came to Pike’s Mills (now Galeton) from
Columbia in Lancaster County to be superintendent of the first lumber mill in Potter County. What he had done leading Methodist meetings in Columbia, he continued to do at Pike’s Mills – well before any regular preacher was ever assigned there. He read Wesley’s sermons to congregations consisting of mill hands and their families. His name was Goodman, and no printed record has been found to mention his presence there. A personal letter written years later by his niece, who lived at his home, tells of the pioneer conditions and the religious efforts of her uncle. Rev. O.M. Goodman is buried at Wellsboro. [editor’s note: Portions of that letter appear in The Chronicle for 1998 in the article “Owen Goodman: The Reading Preacher.”]

There were more preachers coming and going in this primitive woodland country than you might think. The settlement at Priestville, near Westfield, was so named because there were so many preachers living there at one time. One of the best known was “Father Conant,” whose services were much sought after. Near Wellsboro, shortly after 1800, one of the first settlers in Delmar township was the Rev. Caleb Boyer. A located elder in the Methodist Church, he was ordained along with Bishop Asbury at the famous 1784 Christmas Conference. This means that he was one of the first 20 elders ever ordained in American Methodism. He may not have remained long, for no church records seem to show his influence here. [editor’s note: See the article “Caleb Boyer: The Disappearing Preacher” in The Chronicle for 1998.]

It might be said of those days that the local preachers were the pastors, and the itinerant preachers were the preachers. This was out of necessity, but it was also very acceptable to the itinerants – the “preachers in charge.” At one time on Tioga circuit, William Colbert wrote in his diary that he had been persuaded to spend some time calling on the members for the sake of restoring harmony among them. He did not enjoy the work, but he confessed that it was probably a necessary exercise.

Revival work also took up a great deal of the time of the circuit riders, and substitutes had to be sent to keep the regular preaching appointments whenever the meetings were protracted. Sometimes the success of the revival, in the number of penitents professing conversion, was very great – at other times it was disappointing. During the period from 1842 to 1844, when the great Millerite prophecies of the coming of Christ and the end of the world were being publicized everywhere, hundreds and thousands of converts were made.

During that period one level-headed churchman wrote to The Christian Advocate that “their revivals nearly ruined them.” His point was that Methodists were making so many converts, and that the converts were being told that all they needed was conversion, that they were actually raising up a generation of members who were in Scriptural ignorance and in need of training. He reminded his readers that Wesley’s purpose for Methodism was to spread “scriptural holiness” abroad in the land, and that they were not doing with this method of evangelism. You could not experience scriptural holiness if you did not know the scriptures. Today we believe he had a point that should have been well taken. After April
15, 1844, when the world did not come to an end and the Millerites were proven to have been mistaken, Methodists saw more backsliders in one year than in any other period in their history.

Something should also be said about the problems of church members of that early day. The first thing to say is that there were not many of them and they did the best they could. Consider this announcement of April 6, 1842:

*Lawrenceville Circuit.* At all appointments the Lord has given tokens of good. At Tioga, where Zion has long languished, the brethren although only 7 in number, resolved to finish their house of worship which has stood for 8 years unfinished. The ladies came to their aid. The house, 70 feet wide and 50 feet long with a commodious class room, was solemnly dedicated on Wednesday, February 16th, with services conducted by our worthy P.E., Rev. William R. Babcock. The congregation was unusually small due to the inclement weather, yet we received pledges and money amounting to $200 toward the debt of $600. The meeting was protracted a number of evenings, and many souls were happily converted. Ira Smith Jr. and E.H. Cronmer.

Considering the membership numbered only 7, one can only speculate on what was meant by an “unusually small” congregation at the dedication.

Wellsboro had its trials, too, as illustrated by the following 1843 report of D.B. Lawton.

*The work of God met opposition here.* I found 2 or 3 cases of inveterate hardness between brethren that continue yet, though we have had the affliction of 2 church trials. *Here are 3 taverns besides some stores which retail liquid death.* But the severest obstacle is the illiberal spirit and the folly of High Church claims. *The Episcopal Church is THE CHURCH and ours is just the meeting house.* Our revival was characterized by unusual stillness, yet some cried “Wildfire!”, “Delusion!”, etc. The ME Church in Wellsborough finished its commodious house for the worship of God last summer, but are now collecting with much difficulty to pay for it. *Besides, we are building a parsonage to be finished this summer.*

The same pastor submitted the obituary of...

*Mrs. Pamela Cooledge,* aged 50, who joined the church 30 years ago and emigrated from Cazenovia N.Y. to Wellsborough in 1823. *She was the first Methodist in Wellsborough… The first pioneers of the cross made her house their home.* She watched with great anxiety the society of half a dozen for years toiling for life, until this winter she was greatly rejoiced to see scores coming to Christ.

The saints of the early days got their feelings hurt, too. Even at old Mr. Cole’s, near Monroeton, Colbert in 1793…

*found them unsettled in their minds.* *Old man Cole desired to have his name taken off the class roll.* His daughter Molly was affronted because her name had not been put on the roll in its proper place by the class leader.
These saints differed among themselves about matters unimportant to us, but very important to them – such as having choirs, musical instruments in the church, and women speaking in the church (except to testify in class meetings and pray in prayer meetings).

There was also the issue in some places about raising money by renting pews. You say, “Did Methodists ever rent pews?” Yes, and right here in our district. Consider this account taken from the 1859 quarterly conference minutes of Williamsport station.

On motion of Dr. I.S. Crawford, the following resolution was unanimously adopted. Whereas the ordinary congregation of the ME Church in this place cannot be comfortable [sic] accommodated in the present church edifice, and whereas a large number of the ME congregation in this place are anxious for the erection of another ME church edifice in Williamsport, the current expense of which shall be met by the annual rental of pews, Therefore be it resolved that we recommend the erection of another ME church edifice in this place by voluntary contributions, the annual expense of which shall be met by the annual rental of pews.

It appears from perusal of this record that some of the best-paying members did not get good seats when the Sunday School and Seminary students got there first, and this was their way of guaranteeing their places. We have not found in the old Mulberry Street records that they ever did raise their money in that fashion.

Considering the lack of cash, the people did fairly well. The salary allowance was hardly ever paid in full, and in many places there was no missionary offering paid during the first quarter of the century. But the Conference tried to present the causes to the preachers, and the preachers to the people, in a stimulating manner – and a reasonably good beginning was made as soon as a charge became established. The Centenary Offering of 1839, by the way, raised money for missions and for the educational institutions – especially for those dedicated to the education of ministers’ children. The fund which eventually came to Central Pennsylvania to start the Preacher’s Aid Society was originally contributed by the people in the Centenary Offering of 1839.

When circuits got smaller, a preacher in charge could have a family and live in a parsonage. At many places, these residences were provided very slowly and with great reluctance. Since the early allowance for a single preacher was only half as much as for a married one, many charges insisted that they could not afford a wedded man. But finally, beginning about 1825, parsonages were rented – and eventually purchased or built – by the charges. Furnishings were very meager, seldom more than the bare necessities, until the conferences began to set some standards. In 1842, New York’s Black River Conference recommended “a convenient amount of heavy furniture for the accommodation of the preachers” as follows:

*In our opinion the following articles at least should be furnished in every charge, and that they should be of a quality to be worth the price affixed: 1 cook stove and pipe, $22; 1 parlor stove and pipe, $15; 1 pair shovel*
and tongs, $1; 3 bedsteads, $14; 12 chairs, $12; 2 rocking chairs, $5; 2 looking glasses, $3; 1 bookcase and writing table, $8; 2 wash tubs and bench, $3; 1 wash board and mop stick, 75¢; 1 round barrel (the rain barrel), iron hooped & painted, $1.50; 1 wood saw and buck, $1.50; 2 cherry tables to match, $10; 2 light stands, $5; 1 wash stand, $2.50; 1 bureau, $15; 1 clock, $8; 1 axe & 1 shovel & 1 fork, $3.25; 1 pine soap barrel, $1; 1 pair flat irons, $1; 2 patent pails – carpeting discretionary, $25. Total cost, $150.50 [sic].

Before Civil War times, only the better stations provided all of these luxuries and conveniences. Few parsonages were so well supplied as the recommendations of this report. Even then, Methodist resolutions were well made but Methodist practice did not catch up with her policies.

It should be said somewhere in this paper that one of the great issues of the time represented by this history was that of the colonization of freed slaves. Dr. John Price Durbin, President of Dickinson College, and later General Secretary of the Missionary Society, was an active exponent of a plan to purchase the freedom of all Negro slaves and provide for the necessary expense of transporting them to Liberia – or anywhere else they could live in freedom. He went a little further than Abraham Lincoln’s plan. But one of the early fund-raising efforts in Pennsylvania in the 1840’s was to request each preacher to raise $5 from each of his churches for this purpose. Northern Methodists believed in the abolition of slavery, but never so much as thought of integration.

I close these ramblings with a notable observation by a Methodist preacher in July of 1845. The General Minutes of that year showed a decrease of 36,000 members over the last 12 months. Probably about 1/6 of these were seceders to the Wesleyan Methodist Church, while at least another 1/6 resulted from a general sifting of the additions to the church during the Millerite Adventist excitement of the last few years. Unwilling to dismiss the statistics without further self-examination, the writer states:

But I am inclined to think the cause is elsewhere. Many preachers find fewer members than reported by their predecessors. Class leaders do not see their members at least once a week. If every leader did this, there would be fewer backsliders. We might have fewer members – but better ones. Our church might get smaller – but more influential in the world.

I had rather have one small spring of water than a large stagnant pool.

So would I. May all of our churches so come to adapt themselves to the business of spreading the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in this day of spiritual drought, that it shall be said a century from now that each one was a small spring of living water refreshing a dry and thirsty land, and not just a large stagnant pool! Amen.