

Early Central Pennsylvania Methodism: from Whitefield to Asbury

by Charles Berkheimer, 1968

Editor's note: This was a major document in progress at the time of Dr. Berkheimer's death, and not an article ready for publication. To keep the flow of the paper, some of the author's "tangents" have been converted to footnotes. Footnotes added by the editor, that were not part of the original manuscript, conclude with "-ed." Otherwise, the material is presented as prepared by Dr. Berkheimer in 1968 and preserved in the conference archives with his other research notes.

Covering the origins of Methodism in Central Pennsylvania in a single paper is a difficult assignment. Now that the Northern Tier of counties previously served from New York and several southern charges previously served by the Baltimore Conference have been placed within our boundaries, the paper must also include material not previously found within our historical collections. My approach shall be to present the introduction of Methodism into Central Pennsylvania in broad terms, and then to discuss the expansion of the work and the creation of smaller circuits year-by-year beginning in 1789 and continuing until the death of Asbury in 1816. This paper, then, shall concentrate on the development of the circuits. Treatments of camp meetings, Sunday Schools, controversies, conference agencies and the like must wait for another time.

George Whitefield

The title "Methodist" is now borne with honor by the spiritual descendants of John and Charles Wesley, but it was not conferred at first as an honorable one at all. It was thrown in ridicule at the pious young men at Oxford University in England who were so methodical in their habits at worship, devotions, social service activities, and studies – indeed, in all matters of conduct. In addition to the Wesley brothers, who are usually named as the founders of Methodism, there were a number of other devout students and instructors at the University who belonged to the "Holy Club" and were dubbed "Methodists" by the impious. The most eloquent preacher among them was George Whitefield, who followed the Wesleys to the New World but differed decidedly with them in theology and the promotion of "Scriptural Holiness."

Whitefield became noted as an evangelistic preacher in America, and vast throngs of people crowded to hear him preach wherever he went. Not an organizer or administrator, he established no formal societies of his numerous converts – although his influence upon people was profound. In 1741, on one of his numerous trips to this country, he is said to have appeared at Harris' Ferry, now Harrisburg, and stayed there for some time preaching to the people who flocked

from all quarters to hear him. His biography makes no reference to this incident, but during that summer he made Philadelphia his headquarters and embarked on numerous trips into “the interior.” Mrs. Bell, the granddaughter of John Harris, later reported that “so great was the fascination of his eloquence that many of the people neglected the cultivation of their farms, and their fields were left unsown.” The following winter, some were destitute because of this and needed the help of Mr. Harris to keep from starving. That he gave it to them is cited as a proof of the liberal kindness of the founder of Harrisburg.

The first Methodist preaching in Central Pennsylvania, then, was that of George Whitefield at Harrisburg in 1741.

Early Local Preachers

The first advocates of Wesley’s Methodism to arrive in America came not as preachers, although they were licensed as local preachers in their native land, but as immigrants seeking a new home. They were Philip Embury, a carpenter who settled in New York City, and Robert Strawbridge, a farmer who settled in rural Maryland. Tradition says both started to preach about 1766, a few years after coming here, with the distinction of being the first to proclaim the Word belonging to Strawbridge.¹ Recent studies have revealed that Strawbridge spent the major portion of his time away from his home, where he had established a preaching place, on trips into Virginia and Pennsylvania to preach and establish meeting places.²

Where he preached in Pennsylvania is not revealed, and we can only speculate that it was he who came about 1770 to the place in present Adams County where Rock Chapel was commenced in 1773 and finished in 1776. No

¹ Most recent opinion is that Strawbridge was preaching at least by 1763. He is given credit for founding the Methodist society in Leesburg VA, which was deeded property on May 11, 1766. That lot, the first Methodist-owned property in America, is owned by the Virginia Conference Historical Society and is a National Historic Shrine of the United Methodist Church. During the War of 1812, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States were removed from Washington DC for safe-keeping and hidden for a while in that site’s Old Stone Church. –ed.

² In 1984 historians Ed Schell of the Baltimore-Washington Conference and Raymond Bell of the Western Pennsylvania Conference discovered that Robert Strawbridge owned property in what is now Huntingdon County PA as early as 1775. While they were unable to fix the exact the location of the property, their discovery did shed light on the heretofore unexplained “Methodist class” without a preacher that Presbyterian preacher Philip Fithian found in Shirleysburg 8/27/1775 and the “old members” the first documented Methodist circuit rider Robert Ayres found in the area in June 1788 when he ventured into what he thought was virgin Methodist territory. In 1998 Central Pennsylvania Conference archivist Milton Loyer located the property along PA-655 and Sideling Hill Creek in Fulton County. Apparently the southern boundary of Huntingdon County was not carefully determined until after 1800. Even though Strawbridge and his heirs paid taxes in Huntingdon County, and their 1798 sale of the property was recorded in Huntingdon County, the land was later determined to be in present Fulton County. As Robert Strawbridge kept no journal, there are still many unanswered questions regarding his preaching and properties in Pennsylvania. –ed.

name has come down in the tradition which records the above dates, but the site is not much more than fifty miles north of Strawbridge's home in Maryland. At this time there were not yet definite boundaries to the several circuits that existed, and the preachers were sent out to go where they were able to preach. In 1773, the year of the first Conference, the Baltimore circuit had four preachers – two of whom were Francis Asbury and Robert Strawbridge. It is much more logical to conclude that Strawbridge or one of his co-laborers was the one who appeared here “about 1770” than to accept the suggestion that the Chester circuit, which was not established until a year after Rock Chapel was started, had sent one of its preachers this far west.

But no matter who the preacher was, the date of 1770 is the earliest date of any record of an itinerant Methodist's appearing within our Conference territory – and 1773 is the earliest date for beginning a meeting house, and 1776 is the earliest date for completing one. This preaching place was part of Little York circuit, and later Carlisle circuit. It was rebuilt in 1849 and still stands as a Conference historic site – although now discontinued as a preaching place, except for an annual service.³

The Strawbridge influence was also responsible for establishing the Conference's second known preaching place, near the Maryland line, in 1772. That fall Philip Gatch, a recent (January 1772) convert of Strawbridge's, went from his father's home “to a place he knew in Pennsylvania on the road between Baltimore and York” in an effort to test his call to preach. He made three appointments for a Mr. Perigo to preach – one of these was near John Lawson's, south of present Shrewsbury, and the other two were in Maryland just south of the Mason-Dixon line. Lawson entertained Gatch in his home, but he would not open it for preaching because he was a professed Calvinist. In consequence, another house was secured for the service. When the appointed time arrived, however, there were two changes: (1) Mr. Perigo could not come and Gatch himself was to preach, and (2) Lawson had opened his own home for the service. This turn of events helped confirm Gatch's call to preach. He preached until his location in 1778. Gatch later moved to Ohio, where he helped open preaching places and served as a leading Methodist layman. For many years he served as a circuit judge in Ohio, where he died a much respected Methodist pioneer.

John Lawson not only opened his house for preaching, but shortly after his conversion he erected a “house for school and religious meetings” on his own land. About 1788, this building was lost to the Methodists and Lawson's relative, John Low Sr, opened his home and remodeled it for winter church services – with a swinging partition fastened to the ceiling that could be moved to provide room for the congregation. This second place of worship for the area's Methodists was

³ Rock Chapel is under the care of the York Springs congregation. In addition to the annual homecoming service the second Sunday afternoon in September, the Chapel holds a candlelight service each Christmas Eve. The building, which is open by appointment for historical viewing, is also used for weddings and other special occasions. –ed.

known as Low's Meeting House. From 1788 to 1815 the summer meetings were held in Low's barn and the winter gatherings assembled in this house.

In 1815 John Low Sr and his wife died. Their equally devoted son John Low Jr then led the movement to erect Rock Chapel (not to be confused with the previously mentioned structure of the same name in Adams County) along the York-Baltimore road, south of Shrewsbury and just above the Mason-Dixon line. This was the mother church of Methodism in Shrewsbury, Stewartstown, and probably Gatchelville. These founding saints are all interred in the adjacent burying ground, also on the Low farm.

Another memorable related site is Low's Camp Ground, also donated by this family. Here for many decades the greatest preachers of Methodism came to preach, and the spirit of Methodist revivalism and evangelism ran high and deep. For years this was known as the Baltimore Camp Meeting, because throngs of Baltimore Methodists attended annually. Later it became a National Holiness Camp Meeting. It was run by an inter-conference board of trustees, comprised of members from the Baltimore and Central Pennsylvania Conferences. When trains became the chief means of conveyance for visitors from afar, the grounds were moved from the Low farm to a new site along the railroad. It is now the Summit Grove Camp Meeting, owned and operated by the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church.

In confirmation to the reference to John Lawson as the leader of the first class in Shrewsbury township, York County, there is the diary of John Littlejohn.⁴ He had been admitted on trial into the Conference in 1777 and appointed as one of the four preachers on the six-week Baltimore circuit. His journal includes the following references:

- Thursday, September 11 – preached at Brother Lawson's from Isaiah 38:1, "Set thine house in order..." Met the class and we were quickened.
- Thursday, November 6 – preached at Brother Lawson's from I Thessalonians 5:6, "Let us not sleep, as do others..."
- Thursday, August 27 – preached at John Lawson's from Matthew 21:23, "By what authority doest thou these things?..." Called for the class papers and found since April last some had met only 2,3,7,8,9 times. Gave them a class paper – a faithful warning and serious admonition to beware of unfaithfulness.

Little York Circuit

Methodism was now slowly expanding into York County, with its overwhelming German population which was largely Lutheran and Reformed in church affiliation. Whoever would attempt to preach a gospel of salvation which could be experienced in an individual's own life would have a hard time with

⁴ The Littlejohn Journal is the property of the Louisville Conference Historical Society. It was copied by Miss Annie Winstead of The Upper Room for Dr. Raymond M. Bell of Washington PA.

most of the regular churchmen. But Freeborn Garrettson, one of the three preachers appointed in April 1780 to Baltimore circuit was the man to do it. He spent January, February and part of April 1781 preaching and forming a circuit in York County with considerable success. His Journal for January 24, 1781 says that he “set out to form a circuit.” He tells of preaching in many private homes: including Hollopeter’s (Wellsville), Worley’s (York), Dover, Lewisberry, McCleester’s Town, Buttstown (Franklinton), Abbottstown, Dillsburg, and Cumberland township. Some of these are now in Adams County. His circuit was to be called Little York, as distinct from New York. He does not mention a Carlisle section. At Conference that year he reported 90 members, and these formed the nucleus of Little York circuit to which Philip Cox was appointed as the first official itinerant in April 1781. This was the first regular circuit within the bounds of the present Central Pennsylvania Conference.

Little York circuit grew steadily, gaining new converts and adding preaching places until it embraced the northern part of York County, all of Cumberland County, and part of Perry County. But it never contained the appointments in the southern part of York County – for after the old Baltimore circuit was divided, Low’s and other preaching places in that area were part of Harford circuit which was largely in Maryland.

On September 25, 1781, Francis Asbury made his first visit to our Conference territory when he rode to York on his way from Virginia to Philadelphia. Here he met German Reformed pastors Ranckle and Wagner, who were quite hospitable to him. Significantly, Pastor Wagner had been a pupil of and was now a colleague of Philip William Otterbein – who had left York for an independent Reformed congregation in Baltimore in 1774, and was later a co-founder and bishop of the United Brethren Church. Wagner must have shared some of his old teacher’s views on “experimental religion.” Asbury seems to have spent several days in and around York, but he does not mention his preaching places in his edited journal.

In 1782 societies were organized at York, Wellsville and probably other places. That August, Francis Asbury wrote that he “rode to Little York and dined with Mr. Otterbein and Mr. Wagner.” He preached on Monday the 12th in the German school house. He seems to have remained in York for about a week, but whatever he wrote in his original journal was deleted in the editing he gave it shortly before his death.

In 1783 Little York circuit reported 156 members. Francis Asbury made his third visit to the area and attended a Saturday/Sunday quarterly meeting on July 26/27 at James Worley’s who lived “in sight of” but about a mile west of the little town of York. Worley was York’s first Methodist, converted after hearing Garrettson preach in a tavern south of town in January 1781. His wife was converted the following day when Garrettson preached in the German Reformed Church at York.

Persecution of York County Methodists

It does not need to be pointed out that during the Revolutionary War period, Methodism was an infant in a divided and troubled family. To begin with, Methodism had its origins in England – as a society within the Church of England. Anything English was offensive to the patriots, and this included the Anglican Church. Under this trial, most of the English preachers returned to England, and those who remained discouraged Methodists from active participation in the war. And when Wesley wrote his widely-read tract opposing the American Revolution against England, it had serious political repercussions here.

Some Methodist preachers readily took oaths of allegiance to their states, required of all males over 18 years of age, but others found the oaths unfair and obnoxious to either pro-British or pro-American persons. John Littlejohn, on Baltimore circuit in 1777 and having preaching places in southern York County, noted that the penalty for each sermon preached by a minister refusing to take the oath was 5 pounds for each 100 pounds he possessed – and the alternative was jail. Even before the Declaration of Independence and formal rebellion, Methodists were mostly considered Tories – i.e., sympathizers with England. In 1775 Littlejohn was taken before a magistrate for not having a pass, and warned to drop his association with Methodist preachers. Later he escaped being tarred and feathered by a mob only because a magistrate protected him.

Nor was Littlejohn the only pioneer preacher to pay a price for his principles. Freeborn Garrettson, for example, who founded Little York circuit, was a conscientious objector to warfare – his forbears were Quakers. In consequence of this he was arrested, fined, assaulted, and threatened with hanging on two occasions by angry mobs. In fact, the year before he started Little York circuit he was arrested while preaching one Sunday in Cambridge MD and confined to a dirty jail cell for weeks instead of being brought to trial. This was designed to keep him out of pulpits, and from traveling around as a dangerous and subversive person. Although in much physical discomfort, he was spiritually lifted by his own communion with his Lord and by the prayers and concern of his brethren – particularly Francis Asbury, who wrote to him, sent him a book, and successfully interceded on his behalf with the governor of Delaware.

Pennsylvania, with its Quaker heritage and welcome to all religionists of whatever creed, did not oppress the Methodists quite as severely. Captain Thomas Webb of Old St. George's in Philadelphia, however, was a different matter. As a commissioned British army officer, he was naturally suspected of being a spy and imprisoned in Bethlehem for 15 months. After that, he returned to England in 1788 – never to return.

And there were many Pennsylvania patriots who thought all Methodist preachers were indeed Wesley's agents – sent out expressly for the purpose of fighting against the revolutionary cause under the shield of passive resistance. This distrust and persecution also filtered down to the converts of these pioneer itinerants – although their persecution was not physical. It was a kind of ostra-

cism by their former friends, many times by those who were members of the previously established churches. They could not believe that Methodist theology was orthodox, or that its customs and usages were properly Christian.

Philip Gatch, one of the founders of Methodism in southern York County, was persecuted for such reasons – he was actually tarred by a mob led by a man who was enraged by his wife’s conversion. Among the numerous laity so persecuted was Alexander Ewing of Gatchelville – the ancestor of a phenomenal list of Methodist ministerial and lay descendants. His 1832 obituary in *The Christian Advocate* contains this tribute: “One of the first five in his neighborhood who embraced the religion of Jesus among the Methodists. In the midst of persecution he joined the Methodist Episcopal Church, became a class leader, and a sometime local preacher. For about 40 years he kept on this way, possessed of a strong mind and improved by the study of God’s word. He preached the word with power and was eminently useful in calling sinners to repentance.”

Other Circuits Are Formed

Shortly after Philip Gatch established the first preaching place in southern York County, a Methodist local preacher named Michael Cryder purchased property near Huntingdon. In 1773, he “built himself a mill and labored diligently to found Methodism among the scattered settlers.” It was not until 1788 that Huntingdon circuit was formed with Samuel Breeze and Daniel Combs, but Cryder must have succeeded in forming a class or two in this area a decade prior. When Presbyterian missionary John Philip Fithian reached Shirleysburg in 1775, he wrote that “there is a Methodist Society here, although they have no stated minister” [see footnote #2 –ed.].

Soon Methodists had settled in Perry, Juniata, and Mifflin counties. In 1784 Asbury set off a new circuit called Juniata from that northern sector of Little York Circuit that was too far to reach regularly by the itinerant. Forty members were transferred from Little York to the new circuit. Asbury sent Simon Pile to serve it – but either he did not go or he was incapacitated during the year, for two young preachers not yet on trial were sent there for a round or two of preaching. One was John Paup, probably from near Wellsville, and the other was Robert Ayres⁵ from near Dillsburg – both likely converts of Freeborn Garrettson, and

⁵ Ayres served as a Methodist itinerant only three or four years and then went into the Episcopal Church – but he kept a journal which was discovered recently by Dr. Raymond M. Bell of Washington and Jefferson College. From this journal for 1785, we quote a portion descriptive of the reach of the old Juniata Circuit.

- Wed, May 11 – started from Groves in Newberry township, York County, and rode to Carlisle.
- Thu, May 12 – rode 10 or 12 miles to Thomas Such’s [near Shermansdale, now Perry County] and met a kind reception. Brother Such rode with me 3 or 4 miles to Brother James Mittens’, where I lodged and was well used.
- Fri, May 13 – rode 5 or 6 miles to George Evans’. I tarried a little while and then rode over the Tuscarora mountains, 24 or 25 miles to Wells’ Ferry on the Juniata River – and 2 miles over to

both to be admitted into the ministry on trial at the next Conference. At this Conference James Riggins was sent to Juniata Circuit, but after that it was discontinued and combined with Little York for some years – re-appearing again as a circuit in 1804.

While scanning the old records to uncover the bounds of circuits and the locations of preaching places, we must not lose sight of the fact that Methodism was a missionary movement and all early preachers considered themselves missionaries as well as evangelists. It was the duty of the preachers to map out new sections for Methodist services and to make suggestions for new circuits to be formed. One of the most dramatic examples of this is seen in the missionary travels of young David Coombs – who with his brother Daniel, both from Bucks County PA, joined the Conference on trial in 1787.

David was appointed to Little York and Juniata Circuits combined, already a geographically extensive assignment. Yet this young missionary was not content to follow within the bounds of his predecessors, for that year he traveled up the Juniata Valley, crossed the Seven Mountains, and formed a class at the newly founded wilderness home of Philip and Susannah Antes in Bald Eagle Valley, at present Curtin in Centre County. This class has had a continuous existence to this day, and a romantic history in producing ministers for the Master's Kingdom.⁶

Brother Moore's [near Mifflintown]. There I lodged and met the next morning with Brother Paup, whom I was traveling to assist.

•Sat, May 14 – preached at Mr. Moore's at 2 in the afternoon.

•Sun, May 15 – had a lively Love Feast and public preaching at 12. Brother Paup preached and I exhorted... In the evening, rode to friend Cookson's and tarried. Next morning, rode to friend Moore's again. Brother Paup and I and 2 men crossed the Tuscarora mountain [returning east] and came to Brother Leonard's, where we lodged.

•Tue, May 17 – rode to friend Evans' and took our leave after breakfast – distressing friend Evans at our leaving. Rode to Titsell's where none came out, so rode to Mittens' where I preached and Brother Paup exhorted. Next morning, went to Brother Such's and I spoke there. Next morning, rode over North mountain [at Sterrett's Gap] and through Carlisle down to Brother Bricker's [probably near Silver Spring], where we lodged. Next morning, rode to below Dill's Tavern, where we parted. I went to friend Styers' where I met Brother Ellis [Michael Ellis, preacher in charge of Little York Circuit].

•Fri, May 20 – rode to Sylvanis Day's, thence to friend Monturf's, thence to Brother Swisher's [near Rock Chapel, now Adams County] – next day being Quarterly Meeting.

•Sat, May 21 – preaching in the Chapel; Brother Ellis, Brother Bond, Brother Paup all spoke. Friend Swisher gave a bond of performance [deed?] concerning the meeting house land.

•Sun, May 22 – Love Feast, and all spoke. Started from Swisher's and lodged at Sylvanis Day's. Next morning, started for my father's and got there in the evening. Spent the week with old neighbors.

•Sun, May 29 – rode to Brother Styers, where I used to teach school, and preached. Thence, rode up to Rock Chapel where I met Mr. Butler to go to Baltimore. Rode 50 miles to friend Bond's and Tuesday the 31st rode into Baltimore. [At this Conference Ayers and Paup were admitted on trial.]

⁶ The first class met at the Antes home until 1805 when Eagle Chapel, the first Methodist church building in Centre County, was erected on Antes' land. When the family sold their Bald Eagle mill and other property and moved to Clearfield County in the 1820's, Philip Antes gave the land for the first Methodist church building in Clearfield County – peopled with other Methodists who

But this is only part of the story. The same year the Antes class was formed on the Bald Eagle creek, the Benn-Pennington family of Methodists arrived at the head of Penn's Valley and settled near Linden Hall – not far from State College.⁷ It may be assumed that it was Coombs who also organized the famed and historic class populated by these folks. Robert Pennington, long known as the Father of Penn's Valley Methodism, erected a log meeting house near Centre Hall in 1814 – at which time there were also numerous Sankeys, ancestors of the famed gospel singer Ira Sankey, in the class. Pennington's Church no longer stands, although the logs were removed to erect a house still standing in Centre Hall, but the site and remaining burying ground are identified by appropriate markers.

How did the adventuresome young David Coombs happen to find these two families so recently settled, so far into the deeply wooded interior, and so far from the routes of his predecessors? It is this writer's suggestion that Asbury must have learned that the Benns and Penningtons, if not also the Antes, had gone into this sparsely settled territory and told the circuit rider to look them up. This would have been characteristic of Asbury's methods.

In 1788 preacher on trial David Coombs is appointed to "Cumberland" – and with this appointment recorded his name never again appears in the minutes. He was never admitted into full membership, expelled, or discontinued. He was never listed among the disabled or dead. What happened to him? What was his fate? The lack of documentation may be attributed to the great distances and poor communications of the day. It now appears that "Cumberland" was the Kentucky territory toward which many were then migrating, and that young David Coombs was killed by Indians en route to his assignment.⁸

came about the same time from Bald Eagle Valley, and they called their new church "Centre" after the land they had just left. This was the real mother church of Clearfield County.

⁷ They were from Acquimimack Hundred DE and were likely converts of Francis Asbury. Robert Pennington and his wife Rebecca Benn were both converted in Delaware in 1776. Rebecca Benn was the daughter of Henry Benn Sr, who with his son Henry Benn Jr and their families arrived in Centre County about 1787. A Benn family tradition says that the elder Benns were Jewish people converted under Asbury and now resettling in a new state. The same tradition says they organized a Methodist class the same year they arrived, which would mean that the Antes and Benn classes were organized the same year – probably by the same traveling preacher, and probably on the same trip through the region. While Coombs' instrumentality in establishing the Antes class is well-documented, his similar involvement with the Benn class is by inference. We do know that both classes were well-established when Colbert traveled Northumberland Circuit in 1792. By 1800, the Benn family had migrated to Venango County PA and were as active in establishing Methodism there as here. Five Benns became Methodist preachers in western Pennsylvania, and Dr. Rachel Benn of the same family was one of the first Methodist medical missionaries to China. When the Benns moved on, the Penningtons assumed leadership of the class.

⁸ Jacob Payton, on page 113 of his book *Our Father Have Told Us*, relates the following story in connection with the founding of Fell's Church in western Pennsylvania: "On a certain Sunday of that year [1788] a congregation gathered at the home of Mrs. Casner, where the town of Donora now stands, to hear David Coombs who was on his way to Kentucky. In the congregation were Benjamin Fell and his son John. The latter was amazed to discover in the preacher an old friend whom he had last met at an Eastern ball. The change in his friend, the sermon, with the blessing

Year by Year Developments

This paper continues with a year-by-year description of the progress of Methodism within the bounds of our conference from the time of Asbury's 1789 first episcopal visit [since becoming bishop in 1784] until his death in 1816.

1789 In 1789 Bishop Asbury passed through our territory on his way to the West. It was July, and the heat and labor of harvest time were enervating to both preachers and people. Passing through Columbia, Asbury came to York "but felt no desire to preach." He proceeded to Carlisle and preached in the Episcopal Church in the morning, but he was denied the privilege in the evening because he did not read the prayers. He then went to the courthouse "and called them to repentance." The next day he and Richard Whatcoat, his traveling companion for this trip, started the arduous journey across the mountains. While it's not possible to determine their exact route, Asbury records finally reaching the Juniata River after "we were well nigh being lost in the woods." They spent the night with "I.C." – possibly near Huntingdon at Israel Cryder's, the son of Michael Cryder. Traveling down the Raystown Branch, they "yielded to the persuasion of some who desired us to stay and preach" nine miles from Bedford. From Bedford they traveled the Forbes Road, the present US-30. This was Asbury's first trip west using a northern all-Pennsylvania route – as previous trips followed the Potomac River and Braddock's Road, the present US-40. In this sense, 1789 marks the official commitment of Methodism to the interior wilds of Central Pennsylvania.

1790 New settlers were now erecting their log cabins and establishing their homes all through the central part of Penn's Woods. Coming in canoes up the rivers and streams, or traveling the horse paths through the valleys and over the mountains, they pushed back the wilderness. The circuit riders followed them with the Gospel, for Methodist polity dictated that the preachers should go where the people were.

Into the Half Moon Valley in Centre County, Peter Gray and his family had come from Maryland. His humble log house became a preaching appointment, and a lodging place for the itinerants in the earliest years of Huntingdon circuit. The preachers were cordially welcomed to whatever the Grays could share, even after fire had destroyed their possessions and the family had to sleep on straw on the floor until they could again have bedsteads made. Gray's Church is the outgrowth of the first class formed here in 1790. The Gray family hospitality provided the church's "first nursing home" when Bishop McKendree was

of the Holy Spirit, soon resulted in John Fell's conversion. At the invitation of Benjamin Fell, David Coombs crossed the river and preached to a large congregation at the Fell homestead. A few days later near Wheeling, Coombs was murdered by the Indians. His untimely death, so soon after he had preached to them, made a deep impression upon the congregation [and they eventually organized and erected a church building]. From Fell's Church, the old Methodist hive from which have swarmed so many religious workers, went John Fell into the itinerancy."

the distinguished and welcomed visitor. On his way in 1813 from conducting the Genesee Conference, and traveling toward the South by way of Huntingdon and the Juniata Valley, the Bishop's horse threw him and his leg was broken. He was taken to the Gray home, and there he recuperated under the family's care for some weeks. Before he left he preached several times, and generally repaid the family by the blessings he bestowed on them.

In other parts of Huntingdon circuit, substantial homes were opened and classes formed which were destined to have long and fruitful existences. John Rowen was the circuit preacher, and one of those homes was that of Isaac Thompson near Burnt Cabins. Isaac Thompson was born in Chester County in 1762, moved to Burnt Cabins in 1786, and said, "In March 1791 I was converted under John Rowen's sermon – the first ever preached in my house. I obtained sanctification in 1803." For 40 years he was the leader of one and some-times two classes. For 44 years he was a steward, and for 24 years he was recording steward. Francis Asbury at least once accepted his hospitality. At his own expense he erected the first church building near Burnt Cabins, the predecessor of the one built in the village in 1851. When he died in 1843, having no children, he willed half of his estate to the Missionary Society of the M.E. Church and the other half to the Preacher's Aid Society of the Baltimore Conference.

Other Huntingdon circuit successes about this time include the erection of the chapel later referred to by Asbury at Three Springs, and the beginning of regular preaching in Wells Valley. This was also when the Widneys, from Ireland, arrived in Concord and began holding services there.⁹

The first class was formed in Shippensburg in 1790. This was one of the early and substantial points on the Little York and, later, Carlisle circuit.

It was also in 1790 that Richard Parriott, one of the preachers on Little York circuit, did what Robert Ayres from Bath circuit did when he laid out Huntingdon circuit two years earlier – he went into Northumberland County and hewed out a circuit in a vast territory that now embraces ten counties. He preached at Northumberland, Lycoming Creek (Williamsport), Buffalo Valley, Penn's Valley, Bald Eagle Valley, and the North Branch and West Branch of the Susquehanna – and reported 180 Methodists there. While some of the classes had been formed prior to this time (Bald Eagle Valley, Penn's Valley, and probably Northumberland), Parriott organized ones at Lycoming Creek and elsewhere and forged the work into a viable circuit.

1791 This year Richard Parriott and Lewis Browning were appointed to the newly created Northumberland circuit, where they labored with much success. This was also the year that William Colbert, whose Journal is one of our major resources, was junior preach on Harford circuit – the northern portion of which

⁹ For a thorough treatment of the Concord circuit, including the Thompson log church near Burnt Cabins and 17 other pioneer appointments, refer to the article "History of Concord Circuit" in the 1997 volume of *The Chronicle*. –ed.

touched the southern portion of Little York circuit in York County. He preached regularly at four Pennsylvania appointments which have peculiar significance for us: Allen's, Manifold's, Ewing's and Low's meeting house. His Journal for 1791 includes the following:

- Friday, May 27 – preached at Thomas Allen's. [He calls them "Presbyterian friends" who lived near Gatchelville.] Went from Allen's to Low's meeting house and preached there on Sunday. [Low's was a regular Sunday appointment by this time.]

- Friday, June 24 – at Allen's and met 3 new probationers, newly converted – namely, Edward Manifold, Alexander Ewing, and his brother James Ewing.

Edward Manifold was later listed as a class leader at Prospect, which is the name of the Gatchelville church. According to the Journal of Nathaniel Mills, who first mentions Prospect meeting house, it was erected about 1810. The Manifolds settled near Gatchelville in 1741 and, although they were of Presbyterian background, some of them became Methodists.

Colbert pays tribute to Alexander Ewing as a man of unusual intelligence and common good sense in religious discussions – even before his conversion. History confirms Colbert's judgment, for he became a leader in the church and a local preacher. From the vantage point of 1968, we can view something of the amazing records of churchmanship of Alexander Ewing's descendants. For from the time he became a local preacher at Gatchelville to this modern day, members of his family have been in uninterrupted succession in the Methodist ministry.

- James Ewing, the son of Alexander Ewing, was admitted to the Baltimore Conference in 1809 and served for 52 years. He had four sons who were Methodist preachers: John Wesley Ewing D.D., Alexander Tidings Ewing, James Harvey Ewing, and Henry Whitefield Ewing. The daughter of Dr. J.W. Ewing became the mother of Robert Knupp Esq, who is currently lay leader of the Central Pennsylvania Conference.

- Jane Ewing, daughter of Rev. James Ewing, married Anthony Witman and became the grandmother of Rev. Harold Ewing Witman and Rev. Edwin H. Witman. Frank Witman, son of Rev. E.H. Witman, is now a ministerial member of the California-Nevada Conference.

- Alexander Ewing was also the father of two daughters who married brothers James and Tobias Reily, both of them having been pastors at Gatchelville. And the succession of Reilys in the Methodist itinerancy is truly magnificent and significant. Rev. James Reily was the father of Rev. James McKendree Reily, who was the father of Rev. William McKinley Reily, who was the father of another Rev. J. McKendree Reily and of Alice Reily – the wife of Rev. L.L. Owens. And Rev. J. McKendree Reily was the father of Rev. William Reily, now a member of the Ohio Conference. That's 5 successive Reilys in a direct line. In addition, Tobias Reily was the father of Rev. A.R. Reily.

There is no other family within our bounds with such a long succession of ministerial leadership, to say nothing of the leading laymen in the same success-

sion. We have two families that have sent five brothers into the ministry, and a number of sets of three – but nowhere else do we find such a ministerial lineage.

1792 For the first time Wyoming and Tioga circuits appear as appointments – and major portions of both of these original circuits are now in the bounds of Central Pennsylvania. These records indicate the first regular preaching at such places as Towanda and Burlington.

Classes were also formed this year at Williamsburg and at Carlisle, where a meeting house was erected.

This year William Colbert records the fact that he held services on Northumberland circuit at 39 or 40 places – almost all of them private homes, except for a meeting house in Northumberland. While he did not always follow the same route, it helps to envision a big loop from Northumberland to Berwick to Milton to Williamsport to Milesburg to Potters Mills to Lewisburg and back to Northumberland – with variations that involved a Mifflin-Juniata return from Potters Mills, and a Shamokin Valley return from Berwick. The following preaching places can be identified from Colbert's Journal:

Main Loop

- Northumberland – an organized class, and a meeting house.
- William Cox's and John Egbert's – Mahoning (now Danville).
- Joseph Ogden's – on Fishing Creek (near Bloomsburg). The Ogden family were Quakers. Colbert preached here, but formed no class.
- Henry and Peter Melich's – Espy.
- Isaac Holloway's – Berwick. Holloway was the first school teacher in Berwick, and Colbert often stopped to talk (or argue) religion with him. Mrs. Holloway was the daughter of Amos Park of Salem township in Luzerne County, whose home was a Wyoming Conference preaching place. Holloway was a notorious backslider. The class which Colbert organized here the following year did not hold together, and Colbert seems to imply that Holloway's example had something to do with the collapse.
- Christian Bowman's – Briar Creek.
- Joseph Salmon's – on the west branch of Briar Creek. The Salmon family were Presbyterians. Colbert preached here, but formed no class.
- William Pegg's – near Jerseytown. The Pegg family were Presbyterians. Colbert preached here, but formed no class.
- William Search – near Milton.
- Milltown (Milton)
- Isaac Bears – White Deer Valley.
- John and Caleb Farley's – White Deer Hole Valley (Allenwood). The Farleys were from Hunterdon County NJ, and Asbury preached and stayed in their home there before they moved to Pennsylvania and built a mill where Allenwood now stands. Caleb lived on White Deer mountain, where he hewed out a farm. Although not prosperous, he was prominent in Methodist activities and served as

class leader for many years. Many of his descendants were active members in all three former branches of the United Methodist Church.

- Peter Hasting's – Black Hole Valley, between Muncy and Montgomery.
- Joshua White's – near Muncy. White was from New Jersey and was a local preacher in whose home the first quarterly meeting and communion service were held in the Muncy section of Northumberland circuit. These meetings, it must be remembered, were for the entire circuit – and the class leaders and local preachers from as far east as present day Beach Haven and as far west as Milesburg and Boalsburg were expected to attend. Those from a distance sometimes traveled for two days each way for the two days of the meeting's duration – being “entertained” in small log cabins near the place of the meeting, or sleeping in barns which were turned into temporary barracks. The following year, 1793, Joshua White died and his son Alward White was recommended for the itinerancy. The first known ministerial recruit from Northumberland circuit, he served for 39 years.
- Joseph Hall's – Hall's Station, near Muncy. The Hall family were Presbyterians. Colbert preached here, but formed no class.
- Peter Conkle's – Loyalsock township.
- Jeremiah Tallman's – Loyalsock township, now Williamsport.
- Amariah Sutton's – Lycoming Creek, now within Williamsport. Sutton was the first white settler on land now within the city of Williamsport, and it was in his home that the first class here was formed. Although he had earlier given land for church purposes, he was converted in the first meeting held by Parriott in his home in 1790. It is quite probable that his son Arad, in whose home Amariah spent his declining years, came home from the Revolutionary War a Methodist – and thus may have been the very first Williamsport Methodist.
- Richard Manning's – Jersey Shore.
- Martin Reese's – Pine Creek, west of Jersey Shore. Colbert speaks specifically of the natural beauty of Pine Creek Valley. Reese later moved west, became a prosperous lumberman, and has been called “the founder of the Warren PA Methodist Church.”
- Widow Baird's – Liberty, east of Lock Haven. Mrs. William Baird welcomed Colbert, and soon a class was formed in this home. One of her sons married Frances Siggins, fresh from Ireland with her parents – who are said to have entertained Wesley in their home and to have heard him on several occasions. Two grandsons of Mrs. Baird became Methodist preachers – one of them, William Baird, casting his lot with southern Methodism, where he was then serving, and becoming editor of *The Episcopal Methodist* of the M.E. Church, South. Other descendants migrated to western Pennsylvania and were active Methodists there. The Baird family has always been prominent in leadership in the little Liberty Church along the river.
- John and Ananias McFadden's – Dunnsburg (Dunnstown). The McFaddens later migrated west and were leaders in founding several churches in Venango County PA.

- Philip Antes – Bald Eagle Valley (Curtin). Antes is considered the founder of Methodism in Bald Eagle Valley, and he was the donor of the land for the first Methodist church in Clearfield County.
- Henry Benn’s – Penn’s Valley, Centre County.
- Potter’s – Potter’s Mills. The Potter family were Presbyterians. Colbert preached here, but no class was formed.
- Brush Valley, Centre County.
- William and Edward Crawford’s – Hartleton. Union County.
- Barber’s school house – White Springs, Union County.
- Michael Lincoln’s – near Mifflinburg. Michael Lincoln and Benjamin Thompson were originally supporters, if not members, of the Buffalo Cross Roads Presbyterian Church. They became the founders of Mifflinburg Methodism.
- John and Benjamin Thompson’s – Buffalo Valley, Union County. By 1801 Benjamin Thompson was “banker” (treasurer) of Northumberland circuit.
- Thomas Reese’s – Lewisburg.

Mifflin-Juniata variation

- Henry Collins – Kishacoquillas Valley.
- Henry Moore’s – near Mifflintown. Colbert refers to “Moore’s meeting house” and says that it was really on his (i.e., Northumberland) circuit – when he got this far. Much speculation has been given to the location and identification of this structure. While one historian thinks that Moore had actually erected a log chapel on his farm for the use of the Methodists, this was hardly the case – since the nearby Presbyterian Cedar Spring meeting house had been erected before the Revolutionary War for the use of all who desired to hold religious services. That the Methodists had used it quite early seems apparent from Fithian’s experience on his 1775 mission journey. He says that when he got to Cedar Springs the local song leader did not want to lead the singing until he had properly identified himself as a bona fide Presbyterian minister. The man explained that he “did not know whether he was an Anglican, a Seceder, a Methodist, or what.” This church stood midway between Mifflintown and Mexico, and since there is no record of any other Methodists near here at this time it seems unlikely that Moore would build a chapel in the hope that there soon would be some. After Moore died in 1796, Methodism had no presence in the area for many years.
- Samuel Osborne’s – Turkey Valley, Juniata County. Bishop Roberts mentions Turkey Valley as one of the appointments on Carlisle circuit when he began his ministry there in 1802, and Osborne was listed as one of the leading Stewards of Carlisle circuit for some years. He was the father-in-law of Morris Howe, an influential pioneer circuit preacher. Morris’ son Wesley Howe was one of the original members when the Central Pennsylvania Conference was formed in 1869 – but he died that same year, having itinerated for 27 years.
- Patterson’s – near Seven Stars, Juniata County.

Shamokin Valley variation

- Hughes’ – Catawissa. The Hughes family were Quakers. Colbert preached here, but formed no class.

- Wilkerson's – Shamokin Valley, between Elysburg and Snyderstown. This family contributed influential leadership in the early days of their formation to the Irish Valley Methodists, the Shamokin Valley Presbyterians, and the Shamokin Valley Baptists. Colbert mentions that he detected some Calvinistic leanings in the home, and his observation seems to have been well founded.
- Jacob Depew's – near Klinesgrove. Colbert had a hard time resting here because of the crying of the babies and the noise of the other children. Although he refers to them as “the good Depews,” Colbert later retreated from their home to overnight at the quieter residence of David Davis, a local preacher in Sunbury. Depew was married to the oldest daughter of Jacob Gearhart, who settled where Riverside is now on land he was granted for his service as a captain in the Revolutionary War. In 1813 Asbury stayed the night in the home of Jacob Gearhart Jr, who always called himself a “convert of Asbury's.” In 1829 a log building known as Gearhart's church was erected in the Mt. Vernon cemetery west of Riverside. For many years, Danville Methodists crossed the river to worship here before a church building was erected there.
- Sunbury – Services here were held in the old State House, which was actually a jail in which sessions of the court were sometimes held before the erection of the log courthouse in 1796.

Services were held at the above named preaching places with some regularity – in most cases the two appointed preachers followed each other every two weeks. The classes at Northumberland, Benn's in Penn's Valley, Antes' in Bald Eagle Valley, Sutton's at Lycoming Creek (present Williamsport), and probably at John and Caleb Farley's at White Deer Hole Creek (present Allenwood) had been formed by Richard Parriott in 1790 while the territory was still part of Little York circuit.

Appointed in mid-year to Tioga circuit by the bishop, Colbert spent a few uncomfortable and unsatisfactory months there. In July, Asbury had written to Thomas Morell that he thought he ought to “appoint preachers all through the year” – i.e., he would change preachers between conference sessions when it seemed appropriate. This is what happened to Colbert, and his journal speaks specifically of the hardships and discomforts he found in some of the primitive pioneer cabins – although he was treated hospitably at some others. Lines between circuits, districts and conferences were not very clearly defined in these early days – but the line between Northumberland and Tioga circuits ran somewhere between Bloomsburg and Wilkes Barre. This year Colbert lists the home of Amos Park¹⁰ in Luzerne County on Tioga circuit; later the entire Berwick section, including Briar Creek meeting house and the Bowman's and everything to the east, were in Wyoming Conference.

¹⁰ Amos Park was from Connecticut, and he may have been a Methodist when he came here. Land dealings between him and Nathan Beach indicate that both lived near present Beach Haven. Several memorable quarterly meetings were held at the Park home, which was a hospitable dwelling.

Colbert was really hewing out a circuit where one man, John Hill, had served alone for only a few months. He traveled up the North Branch beyond Wilkes Barre and through territory which is now in Wyoming Conference. He covered all of what is now Bradford County, part of Tioga County, and Chemung area of New York to Newtown (now Elmira) and the Seneca Lake region.

Colbert's first impression of Tioga circuit was unfavorable. Above Nanticoke he had a dreary and difficult time and found no clean place to stay. After getting out of the Narrows, he started the day by breakfasting on a frozen turnip. The next night, December 5, he slept on the floor with other people in a tavern at Teague's Hill. At Meshoppen on December 6 he got moldy corn for his horse, but he himself would not eat in such a filthy place. That evening he arrived at Gideon Baldwin's (his first regular preaching place) on Wyalusing Creek and got something to eat – the first for that entire day of traveling.

At Rice's in Shufelt's Flats, present day Asylum, he found "the first class I have met on the circuit." Here he was pressed upon to make some pastoral calls, although he observed that visiting was to him an unpleasant necessity. The pioneer itinerants had little time to make pastoral calls, and they very much preferred to ride and preach the Gospel.

Since we are interested primarily in the section of the old Tioga circuit which is now a part of our Conference, allow me to gloss over Colbert's route into New York during the last weeks of 1792 and mention a few of the people he encountered on his return trip.

1793 At Old Sheshequin, or Ulster, Colbert preached at Captain Benjamin Clark's on January 9. Here was a class which existed for some years until William Clarke, the class leader, moved west and the class was disbanded for several years – but it was newly re-organized about 1824 and has had continuous existence since then. One convert at Ulster who became a most distinguished leader in Methodism was Henry B. Bascom – who became Bishop Bascom of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and in his day was noted as one of the most eloquent preachers in America.¹¹

¹¹ Loring Grant served Tioga circuit in 1808 and 1809 and related this incident: "At Old Sheshequin I preached at the house of Captain Clark. And on one occasion there was a lad of about 16 by the name of H.B. Bascom who came to hear me preach and wept much during the sermon. In class meeting he professed conversion, and he joined the church as a probationer. But it was not until the General Conference of 1828 at Pittsburgh that I knew that the green boy I took into the church at Captain Clark's was a man of world-wide popularity." It was said that the future bishop walked barefoot from his home in the woods above the New York state line to be taken into the Church. His family later migrated to the South, and the young man was admitted into the Kentucky Conference – where he immediately became known for his magnificent appearance and his marvelous eloquence. He taught in two colleges, although he never attended one. His genius as a debater on the floors of annual and General Conferences was early acknowledged, and he was a leader of the southern dissidents who led the movement for the division of the church in 1844. At the 1850 General Conference of the ME Church, South, he was elected bishop – but he died suddenly within a few months of his election.

Another important stopping and preaching place on Tioga circuit was at “old Mr. Cole’s” at a settlement called Macedonia, near Monroeton. Here Colbert faced a personality problem, for he “found them unsettled in their minds. Old man Cole desired to have his name taken off the class roll. His daughter Molly had been affronted because her name had not been put on by the leader.” Later Colbert reveals that Mr. Cole had been influenced by the Universalists who were active in that area – and still are to this day. But the Cole family is notable in Methodist annals because this was the parental home of Elisha Cole, who entered the traveling ministry in 1794 and served two years before locating and becoming the “Father of Bradford County Methodism.” His second itinerant year was served on Milford circuit, Delaware, with William Colbert as senior preacher. Colbert spoke of this association in his journal on February 25, 1804, when he was presiding elder on Seneca District – of which Tioga was one of the 11 circuits he supervised. He stayed several days with Elisha Cole in a farewell visit upon leaving the district.¹² Without doubt the name of Elisha Cole, respectfully referred to as “Father Cole,” is associated with more local churches in the Towanda and upper Loyalsock section of old Tioga circuit than any other one person. He was abundant in his labors for the Lord and Methodism, and local church histories associate him with their origins with gratitude.

Colbert’s remuneration was very meager. On March 31st, when he was trying to close his tour of duty, he writes from Wyalusing: “Four weeks ago I spoke to them of a public collection to be taken now, but nobody said anything, so I came off without anything.” On leaving Tioga circuit, Colbert and Ware took passage for the return trip down the river. That evening they stopped at a cabin where they could not even get straw to sleep on. Ware slept on a chest with a bunch of tow for a pillow, and Colbert got a bag of hay out of the boat. Such were their accommodations.

¹² This was not the only occasion Colbert served as presiding elder over a district that included Tioga circuit and had contact with his friend Elisha Cole. In 1802 Colbert was presiding elder of Albany District, of which Tioga was one of the circuits. On July 30 he came to the house of his old colleague Elisha Cole and observed: “I do not know that the Susquehanna has improved any from the time I came on in ’92, except in the roads.” On Saturday the 31st, together with circuit preachers Osborne and Booth, he held a quarterly meeting “at Tabor’s barn in town.” On Sunday August 1st, he baptized Benjamin Aiken, his wife, and several children of other parents. He then went on to Captain Clark’s at Ulster. In 1803 Colbert had the Genesee District, of which Tioga was then a part, and he spend the first of November on his old circuit. He returned on February 24, 1804, and arrived at Joseph Ballard’s on Sugar Creek – near where the old Burlington meeting house stood, and where the 1822 one still stands. The quarterly meeting that year began at Sugar Creek meeting house on Saturday, and as usual the first sermon was preached by Elisha Cole. Colbert preached, conducted the business, and led the Love Feast. He writes of his disappointment in Samuel Budd, one of the three circuit preachers, who married and deserted the cause. He stayed at Joseph Ballard’s on this, his last quarterly meeting in the Genesee District. By special request he preached a farewell sermon at “Lawrence’s” on Saturday. Monday he stayed with Elisha Cole, and Tuesday he preached at Samuel Cole’s “and had more hearers than I expected.” On leaving Cole’s on March 1st, he stopped at Hollenbeck’s tavern, Wyalusing and Mason Alden’s at Meshoppen.

Landing at Wilkes Barre, Colbert wrote in his journal for April 16, 1793: “I have been 4 months and 8 days on Tioga circuit – one of the most disagreeable places for travel I ever was in, among a refractory sort of people. I lived hard and labored hard, but I fear I did little good. I joined but 3 to the Society while I was there, but I think there is a prospect of good being done. May the labors of my successors be blest more than mine were.”

In June 1793, while Colbert was now deployed to Wyoming circuit, Francis Asbury made a memorable trip across our conference territory. Coming from Maryland, he entered Pennsylvania north of Oldtown – a once prominent village on the C&O Canal between Hancock and Cumberland. He stopped at Fidler’s – the parents of Daniel Fidler, a traveling preacher since 1789. He arrived at Fort Littleton on Saturday, June 22nd, where he exhorted a troubled widow to pray and then “collected the little persecuted society” to preach to them. Coming north on the Tuscarora Indian Path, he crossed the Juniata to Mifflintown and came to Henry Moore’s.

By Thursday, June 27th, Asbury arrived at Penns’ Creek, where he spent the night – quite likely at the tavern of George Gabriel, which was at the northern edge of what is now the town of Selinsgrove. Friday morning they left Selinsgrove and went to Northumberland to breakfast. “It is a little chapel, that serves as a school house, belonging to the Methodists. We have a few kind respectable friends whose circumstances are comfortable.¹³ I gave them a sermon on John 14:6, and in the afternoon paid a visit to Sunbury. The people here are almost all Dutch [German]. I was enabled to speak alarming words on Acts 4:12.”

It was on this visit that Asbury first expressed his concern for the Pennsylvania Germans. Writing on July 3 to Thomas Morrell, Asbury says “to let Valentine Cook¹⁴, upon Clarksburg circuit, know to come and meet me at the

¹³ The “respectable friends” at Northumberland town included the Taggarts (at whose public house Asbury stayed while there), the Bonhams, and probably Daniel Montgomery – all of them coming from Philadelphia to settle in this interior town. Montgomery had been a trustee of old St. George’s in Philadelphia even prior to Asbury’s arrival in America – and while he first settled at Danville, which was so named for his nephew and namesake, he later lived at Northumberland and was well known for his paintings. The “little chapel...belonging to the Methodists,” however, is not so clear. If this society owned a chapel, it was certainly the first on the old Northumberland circuit – although neither church nor civil records make mention of it. But since Colbert in addition to Asbury spoke of a chapel at Northumberland, there certainly was a building used for Methodist services and for school purposes – and the respectable friends alluded to did own considerable property. What kind of building this chapel was is conjectural. The Taggart tavern stood on Queen street, on lot #176 of the original town plot. Among the other properties owned by the Methodists as individuals in 1793 was one assessed with “an unfinished house” and another with a store building. An unfinished house would be like many a new chapel in regular use at this time – without a wooden floor or doors or windows or a stove, yet a better place for meeting by far than a tavern with guests coming and going (or staying to make a ruckus). So it seems a strong possibility that this Bonham property was the “little chapel...belonging to the Methodists.”

¹⁴ Valentine Cook, born in Virginia in 1765, was one of the best educated of the pioneer preachers. After a common English education, he “became so familiar with the German language as to be able to read, write and speak the language with ease.” He had spent some time as a student at

Baltimore conference, October 20. I have found a vast body of Dutch on Northumberland circuit, and the said Cook can preach in Dutch. Had I known it at conference, I would have stationed him here. I believe there are several young men who will do as well on Clarksburg as he.” Some accuse Asbury of being unconcerned about the Pennsylvania German people, but his frequent references bespeak his concern for his “poor German children.” He had only 3 or 4 preachers who could preach in German – others being Jacob Gruber, Peter Beaver, and Henry Boehm. In 1794, Cook was made presiding elder over Northumberland, Wyoming, Philadelphia, Lancaster, Bristol and Chester circuits.

Colbert’s Journal must now fill in what Asbury omitted (or deleted) in his edited journal about this trip. Colbert says on Sunday morning he met the bishop “upstairs at the widow Taggart’s on Queen Street” and seemed surprised and pleased at Asbury’s friendliness to him: “He spoke to me in a way I was never spoken to by him before; he was very agreeable.” At 11 o’clock Asbury preached in the meeting house, and in the afternoon at Sunbury. At night John Hill (the appointed preacher in charge of Tioga circuit that year) preached in Northumberland and Colbert “rejoiced seeing four preachers in this part of the world.”

On Monday, July 1st, Asbury and Hill and Colbert set out to Joseph Ogden’s on Fishing Creek – probably between present day Bloomsburg and Light Street, near the site of old Fort Wheeler. Here Asbury preached at night, and both Hill and Colbert exhorted the people.

Leaving Ogden’s on Tuesday, July 2nd, he “prayed with our good old Mother Salmon” who lived on the west branch of Briar Creek, on the way from present Light Street towards Berwick – not far from where the Bowman family would settle that year. The preachers went on to Berwick, “where Bishop Asbury preached to a considerable congregation at Isaac Halloway’s, considering the notice the people had.” The appointment must have been for mid-day, or early afternoon, as they proceeded on to Captain Parish’s house at Ross’s Hill in the Wyoming Valley.

Colbert made several rounds in the area in 1793, and he mentions new preaching places – one at Daniel Sunderland’s on White Deer Creek near present Elimsport, and another at Coleburn’s in Moreland township near Opp’s. He also stopped “a little above Milton” at Marr’s and preached in the new stone house that Mr. Marr, the founder of the Episcopal Church at Milton, had just built. He baptized two children of Moses VanCampen, the celebrated Indian scout and Revolutionary War hero who lived between Berwick and present day Bloomsburg.

Cokesbury College. He became a brilliant and forceful preacher and debater, publicly defending Methodism’s theology and polity with noted adversaries in various places. His biographer states that it was he who introduced the “custom of calling anxious ones to the altar to be instructed and prayed for. Previously, penitents knelt wherever in the congregation they happened to be when they were seized with conviction.” Cook’s preaching at quarterly meetings on Northumberland circuit mightily impressed both people and fellow preachers. Sometimes he preached in both English and German to large congregations.

1794 The minutes for this year now record Carlisle as a circuit, as well as Little York. Now there are Huntingdon, Little York, Carlisle and Northumberland circuits within the present bounds of this conference – and also parts of Bath, Harford and Tioga circuits. Bath circuit included Bedford and southern Bedford County. Harford circuit included Low’s meeting house, Ewing’s and Manifold’s (soon to become Prospect meeting house at Gatchelville) – all in southern York County. Tioga circuit included the appointments in present Bradford and Tioga counties. Membership reported this year was as follows: Huntingdon – 194 white, 2 colored; Little York & Carlisle – 276 white, 7 colored; Northumberland – 310 white, 1 colored; Tioga – 133 white.

1795 How many preaching places were included on Huntingdon circuit, now an appointment for seven years, we do not know. In 1795 a class as organized at Shirleysburg, but this may have been the revival of a previous class or society described by Presbyterian missionary Philip Fithian in 1775 [see footnote #2 –ed.]. The earlier class may have disbanded, or it may have included members living within a sizable radius – perhaps served by early local preacher Daniel Cryder, who came into the Huntingdon area about two years earlier and established a mill.

1796 This year classes were in operation in Mifflinburg and Milton. The first Methodist preaching was reported at Bloomingdale in Luzerne County and at Monroeton in Bradford County, undoubtedly at the latter place by Elisha Cole.

The first of the meeting houses at Old Burlington in Bradford County was erected this year – for both school and preaching purposes. The romantic story of the founding of this class on Sugar Creek is told and retold in this valley by the descendants of the participants to this day. The local legends agree substantially with the following narrative, taken from page 148 of The History of Bradford County: *Among the first settlers on Sugar Creek in 1791 were William Dobbins and James McKean, who came from Maryland and whose wives were pious godly women. The very evening after the first company of settlers arrived on the creek, these two women had a prayer meeting. This meeting they kept up for five or six years with what help they could get – but as yet they had been visited by no preacher. One evening a company of young folks assembled for an evening party, when it was proposed to hold a prayer meeting in jest. They began, sang a hymn, and one or two prayed. They sang another hymn, and another undertook to pray. By this time conviction took hold on some of the party and they began to pray in earnest. Meanwhile word was sent to these pious mothers of what was going on. When they arrived, they joined in prayer with the penitents – and before the meeting closed, six declared they had found peace in believing. Father Cole, as he is familiarly called, was sent for. In company with Job Irish, he soon appeared on the ground and held a series of meetings. A class of 18 members was now formed, with Andrew McKean as leader.*

This church, built in 1796 for school and religious purposes, burned down in 1798. Soon after this, another was built on the same site and called “the block

house.” This stood until 1822, when the present building was erected on the same site. This frame church is two stories high with a “wine glass pulpit” and galleries on three sides. It is the only example of this once common type of architecture within the bounds of this conference and has been designated a conference historic site. This third building was used until 1857, when the Burlington and West Burlington churches were erected nearer to where the people lived. An annual service has been held in the “Old Burlington Church” by the descendants of the original founding fathers to this day. Recently a body of trustees was elected to establish a trust fund for its upkeep.

Classes were organized this year in Huntingdon and Chambersburg.

Colbert, on a tour of Northumberland circuit this year, mentions for the first time Robert Pennington in Penn’s Valley. He had previously reported stopping at Pennington’s wife’s father’s home – where a class had been started about 1787. Pennington succeeded his father-in-law Henry Benn Sr (1737-1817) as the class leader partly because the Benns were beginning to migrate to western Pennsylvania about this time. Robert, who became known as “the father of Penn’s Valley Methodism” and his son Henry were both leaders in this class. The son of Henry was John Pennington, who became a traveling preacher and died from exposure before he was 30 years old. All three rest in the burying ground which marks the site of the old Pennington log meeting house. It is located on the former family farm, on the Brush Valley road about a mile east of Centre Hall. One of Robert’s daughters married a Sankey, and in their home was organized the Sankey class – which became the Potter’s Mills, or Sprucetown, Church. The great gospel soloist Ira Sankey was the grandson of this couple.

Colbert also speaks of stopping at James Kinnear’s in Nittany Valley on this tour. Kinnear, an Irish Protestant who was exiled from his homeland, came to America and became a prominent “vendue master” – an Indian trader. He was one of the first members at Old St. George’s in Philadelphia, and his house was described as “the many-windowed paragon of all houses in the vicinity of Old St. George’s.” He was a prosperous and highly respected business man before the Revolutionary War, and Methodism’s General Book Steward at Philadelphia.¹⁵ In

¹⁵ An October 10, 1771, entry in Old St. George’s cash book reports a collection being taken in Kinnear’s home. Methodist historian and editor Leland D. Case conjectures, “Perhaps on a cold night worshippers moved from an unheated church to his elegant many-windowed home kitty-corner from the back door of St. George’s.” That scenario seems plausible when we recall that as yet St. George’s had no windows, no doors, and no floor except the earth. Recent (1958) discovery by historian Ed Schell of the manuscript minutes for the conferences of 1774 to 1777 brings to light the appointment by Thomas Rankin of six circuit “book stewards,” all reputable laymen, who were to report to a General Book Steward at Philadelphia – who was none other than James Kinnear. Every preacher was “to have a regular account of the books in the round [circuit] for the succeeding assistant [preacher] also to bring the money in hand to the General Steward – every round to be supplied with papers and tickets from the Book Steward in Philadelphia.” There is no other reference known to Kinnear as book steward – in Rankin’s journal or anywhere else. While no one can explain why, Case suggests that during the exigencies of the War (in which St. George’s was commandeered by the British Dragoons and turned into a riding stable) Kinnear

1797 Colbert found James Kinnear on Logan's Branch of Bald Eagle Creek, near present Axemann. A century ago the oldest residents there spoke of Kinnear as "the old man who loved to walk up and down the road clad in velvet knee britches and silver-buckled shoes, and who always welcomed and entertained every Methodist preacher who every came near his home." He lived his last days in a log house, part of which was still standing on the Mann property in 1885.¹⁶

1798 Huntingdon circuit was now ten years old. It undoubtedly had started many classes and preaching places which eventually became established churches. Records were not preserved for the earliest years, and local histories are quite sketchy. This year, however, we have record of preaching in Trough Creek Valley and at Petersburg. At year's end preachers Seely Bunn and John Philips reported 242 members, as against the 59 reported ten years before.

This year the first class is said to have been formed at Monroeton on Tioga circuit – probably under the influence Elisha Cole, who lived not far away.

Although appointed to Wyoming circuit, William Colbert made a round on the adjacent Northumberland circuit. He may have arranged a trade with either John Lackey or John Leach, the appointed Northumberland circuit preachers. Whatever the reason for his traveling there, he found the following preaching places he had not previously listed.

- John Hunlock's – Hunlock Creek.
- Blanche's – "at the new settlement" of Huntington, now Luzerne County.
- William Brandon's – in Salem township, east of Berwick. William was a local preacher from Ireland who was admitted to the conference on trial in 1801 and expelled after only 4 years – his last appointment being at Carlisle with Jacob Gruber. He continued as a local preacher, however, and was useful in revivals in the Luzerne County section of the Wyoming Valley. He lived near Town Hill and was probably a school teacher as well as a farmer. There were 2 William Bran-

found it dangerous to traffic with Methodists. He himself had aligned with the Patriots by taking the oath of allegiance to Pennsylvania as a State. In consequence of this he may have lost his lucrative business as a vendue master – for it is known that later his vendue was sold under distress conditions. The reader may guess as to what treatment an exiled Irishman who had become a well-to-do Philadelphian through trading with the Indians might have received during the War. Pennsylvania Archives records indicate records of land grants to Kinnear. After the War he may have been "land poor" and decided to live on his land in the interior of Pennsylvania.

¹⁶ The Kinnear family included two or more half brothers whom James had brought to America from Ireland, and some nephews and nieces. All seem to have been Methodists, and most of them apparently were active in Methodist affairs. James had no surviving children, but his widow spent her last days in the Weaver home between Bellefonte and Pleasant Gap. The older Mrs. Weaver may have been one of the Kinnear nieces. The Weaver Church is named for this family instrumental in establishing several local churches, including Pleasant Gap. The rest of the family moved westward in Pennsylvania, where their names appear frequently in Methodist annals. In 1818 William Kinnear was the leader of the first class in Philipsburg, and in 1825 he was a circuit steward of Clearfield circuit – while his brother James was one of the first exhorters there. Pittsburgh Conference lists of ministers contain the Kinnear name, and other descendants of the Kinnears have been prominent lay leaders there.

dons, possibly father and son, in this part of the conference that were local preachers. It is probable that Brandon Church on Benton circuit was named for one or both of them.

- Samuel Emmitt's – in Frosty Valley, west of Bloomsburg. Colbert states that this Irish immigrant “desired to speak in public” and so was given a chance. He was later licensed as a local preacher, and on July 12, 1807, at a camp meeting at Squire Light's on Tioga circuit, Bishop Asbury ordained him a deacon.

- Swisher's – Black Hole Valley, in Lycoming County near Montgomery.

- Henry Thomas' – on Larry's Creek, near to present Larryville. Henry came from Berks County, had a large family, and was a widower. He married a widow named Thomas who also had a large family of children. As would be expected, there was some confusion listing these children when they grew to maturity.¹⁷

- Helford's – near Antes' on Bald Eagle Creek.

- Michael Lincoln's – in Buffalo Valley near Mifflinburg. A cousin of Abraham Lincoln's father, Michael soon became the most active and highly respected leader of Mifflinburg Methodism. His “stone mansion” was erected about 1 mile east of town, and he was one of the first two trustees of the original Mifflinburg log church. His son and daughter-in-law were the donors of the land on which Lincoln Chapel at Laurelton stands as a memorial to this substantial family of Methodists.

- Philip Stahl's – in Buffalo Valley, near Kelly Cross Roads. When he died, Philip left a fund of \$100 – the interest of which was to go to the support of traveling preachers for at least 10 years. From 1801 to 1811, an item of \$4.00 “from Philip Stahl's Estate” appeared as an annual figure in the quarterly conference records.

- David Davis – a local preacher in Sunbury. Undoubtedly the first Methodist in Sunbury, he moved there in 1793 to take up the shoemaker's trade. Often expressing annoyance with the noisy children in the cabins in which he lodged, Colbert twice left “the good Depews” near Klinesgrove to lodge in comparative quiet with David Davis. He later moved to southern Columbia County, where in 1850 his descendants erected Davis Chapel of the Evangelical (later EUB) Church and contributed a family of 4 brothers to the ministry of that denomination.

¹⁷ There were, for example, two step-brothers named John Thomas – one a traveling preacher and the other a local preacher. John Thomas (son of Mrs. Henry Thomas) was a blacksmith and called “Iron John Thomas” to distinguish him from his step-brother. John Thomas (son of Henry) and his step-brother George Thomas (son of Mrs. Henry Thomas) both joined the Baltimore Conference in 1807. Before entering the itinerancy, John conducted services in Lycoming County as early as 1805. Although in the effective relation for only about 20 years, he was abundant in labors ministerial as a superannuate near Williamsport – and when he passed away he had been in the conference for 60 years. George's lot fell in the Genesee Conference when it organized in 1810. He served there 4 years, for a total of 7 years in the ministry, before returning to his home and serving on Salladasburg circuit as a local preacher. Throughout the years, other members of this large family have been leaders and members in the Salladasburg area.

- Sunbury school house – on Arch Street, on the lot next adjacent to that on which Sunbury’s first Methodist church was erected in 1839.¹⁸
- Shrontz’s – in Shamokin Valley, east of Sunbury.
- Rogers’ – near Catawissa, on Roaring Creek.

1799 Six years elapsed since Bishop Asbury appeared last in our conference territory, and this year his visit was brief. On Saturday August 3rd, Seely Bunn met Asbury at Drinnon’s in Columbia – across the river from Wrightsville. Bunn was the preacher in charge of Carlisle circuit, which then included York – where they ministered the next day, but Bunn was induced to preach while Asbury exhorted. Monday they continued their traveling and stopped at Littlestown, where they dined. After that they went into Maryland.

This year the few members at Chambersburg erected their first church building.

In the northeastern part of the conference, two circuits were united for more effective ministry. Last year Wyoming circuit preacher William Colbert made one round on Northumberland circuit. Apparently this proved agreeable and effectual, for those two circuits were placed together in the appointment list with three preachers for this and one subsequent year.

1800 It is now sixteen years since the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in Baltimore at the Christmas Conference. In 1784 there were already about 15,000 members in the societies, and 83 preachers. At the organizing conference, 20 of the preachers were ordained elders (in addition to Asbury) and 4 of them were ordained deacons. The elders were put in charge of a few circuits each, but there were no organized districts as such.

Now in 1800 there were 51,442 white members and 13,452 colored members in the societies, and 287 preachers. This year Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury and Richard Whatcoat were elected by the General Conference to superintend the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. The work had expanded geographically to virtually all settled portions of the country – from Georgia to Maine on the Atlantic coast, and westward into the Ohio Valley.

For the convenience of the preachers, there were seven conferences set up for this year. In Addition to the General Conference which met in Baltimore in May, meetings were scheduled for Charleston SC, Norfolk VA, Dunworth near

¹⁸ How often the school house was used for preaching services is not known, but a few decades ago the older members of St. John’s could recall that the first Sunday School sessions were held in this little building. Always called “the little school house,” it was likely the first building erected in Sunbury as a private school and presumably stood there for use of the Methodist Sunday School as long as the Methodist church remained at that site. In 1869 the Roman Catholics bought the church building from the Methodists when the latter moved to the present site of St. John’s Church. About the turn of the century, the Catholics moved and sold their church building to the Jewish community to be transformed into a Jewish temple. There may not be another site in the country which has been used by the three major faiths in the above order.

Holston TN, Stone Chapel near Baltimore MD, Duck Creek DE, New York NY, Lynn MA. Even with this arrangement, most had long distances over poor roads or horse paths to get to a conference.

It was not unusual for a preacher to require a week, or even two, to ride to conference – and the same amount of time going to his new appointment. He took it for granted that he would not be re-appointed to the same circuit in those days, so he took all his possessions with him in his saddlebags to conference to be prepared to “go where he was sent.” Everything considered, the preacher on a typical four-week circuit would appear at each appointment only about 8 or 10 times a year. On the occasions when the preacher could not be there, class leaders or local preachers took over the services.

Whereas in 1784 there were just 46 circuits, now there were 163 – most of which had 2 or 3 preachers assigned. Where the bishop knew that local preachers could be depended upon for assistance, he would take that into consideration.

There were 18 presiding elders, each with oversight of about 9 circuits – in each of which he would conduct 4 quarterly meetings a year. This was the beginning of the districts, but it would not be until next year that the districts would be named. Our conference territory was covered by 4 circuits. Harford, Carlisle and Huntingdon circuits were under one presiding elder who had 11 circuits under him. Northumberland was under another presiding elder who only had responsibility for 6 six circuits – but they included Philadelphia, Bristol, Strasburg & Chester, Cecil & Wilmington, and Delaware (i.e., the territory later covered by the Philadelphia and Peninsula Conferences and 3 districts of the Central Pennsylvania Conference!)

This year many new preaching places and meeting houses were started, but several should be mentioned. Bedford County preaching was now scheduled in Bean’s Cove and at the historic Horne appointment.¹⁹ Mr. Widney and his brothers and sisters from Ireland now had a class at Concord and undoubtedly started their church building. The fascinating story of Concord’s first Methodists was written in 1851 by Samuel Williams, one of the extended Widney family, and published in *The Ladies Repository*.²⁰ The first meeting house for school and

¹⁹ The church buildings at both of these locations no longer house United Methodist congregations. The story of Bean’s Cove and other similar southern Bedford County churches appears in *The Chronicle* on pages 54-57 of a 2001 appendix titled “Forgotten Pennsylvania Churches Once Served from Maryland.” Horne’s Church of the Wolfsburg charge literally fell through the cracks of the 1968 denominational union. The last membership figure for Horne’s was 25 in 1951. In 1952 the entire membership was “removed by transfer and otherwise.” From then until the 1968 union it appears as an inactive church with no membership and no financial activity. While the 1968 union placed the building in the Western Pennsylvania Conference, that body appears to have taken no interest in it. A small congregation continues to function as “Methodist” – but with no ties to either the Central Pennsylvania or Western Pennsylvania Conference. –ed.

²⁰ At this point, Dr. Berkheimer gives the 1851 article by Samuel Williams. This article and other information about the Widneys and the Concord circuit may be found in the extensive 1997 “History of Concord Circuit” on pages 42-111 of *The Chronicle*. –ed.

religious purposes was erected about this time at Bloomingdale in Luzerne County.

1801 This year the districts were first named – even though the Annual Conferences were not organized or named until three years later. There were 19 districts for the 72,874 members reported that year – 57,186 white and 15,688 colored. Baltimore District contained Harford circuit (477/161 white/colored members, most of whom were in Maryland), Carlisle circuit (327/12 white/colored members) and Huntingdon circuit (213/1 white/colored members). Northumberland circuit (215 white members) was in Philadelphia District, and Tioga circuit (136 members) was in Albany District.

During the year national membership increased from 72,874 to 86,734, and the number of preachers from 307 to 358. And the circuits within our conference boundaries were no exception to this pattern of growth. Carlisle, for example, added 113 white and 21 colored members. Huntingdon almost doubled, growing to 417. Harford added 79 white and 63 colored members. Although Northumberland circuit decreased from 215 to 175, the unusually large increase reported by Wyoming circuit suggests that a new boundary line had transferred the easternmost appointments to that circuit. Similarly, Tioga circuit in Albany District of the Philadelphia Conference increased by only 10 members because of a boundary adjustment with the neighboring Unidilla circuit. Some circuits were increasing in number of preaching places as well as number of members and would soon have to be divided – or have more preachers appointed to fill the preaching schedule.

This year Dauphin appears as a circuit for the first time, with Jacob Gruber as the preacher in charge, although the class in Harrisburg had not as yet been formed. In addition, the year 1802 saw a church erected in Huntingdon and classes organized, among other places, at Towanda in Bradford county and the Horne appointment in Bedford county.

And 1802 was the year Robert R. Roberts, later the first married bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, began his itinerating ministry. He joined the Baltimore Conference on trial and was sent to Carlisle circuit as junior preacher, with James Smith as preacher in charge. His biography tells something of the extent of the circuit and of the hardships he had to endure that year.²¹

²¹ Born in Maryland, young Robert Roberts had settled in western Pennsylvania – where he was converted and felt the call to preach the Gospel. He had a small farm, but he sold all his possessions except his two horses and saddles and a few personal belongings. He brought his young wife to live with his mother in York while he traveled this extensive circuit, which required him to be away 28 days out of 30. He later recorded that his circuit had 30 preaching places – from Turkey Valley (not far from Liverpool) and Millerstown (probably Pfoutz's Valley) and Thompsontown on the north, to Chambersburg and Waynesboro and York on the south. In present day terms, his circuit included part of Juniata county, all of Perry and Cumberland counties, and all of York county except for a few preaching places just above the Maryland line. That year Roberts wore out both his and his wife's horses and, of course, lost them. He contracted measles and small pox – from which he almost died. But most serious of all, he and his wife were both afflicted with

1803 It was now four years since the Prophet of the Long Road had traveled through central Pennsylvania, but Francis Asbury made a harvest time visit on July 25, 1803. Traveling with Henry Boehm from Philadelphia towards the west, he crossed the Susquehanna at Columbia and lodged at in York county at Strickler's, near Wrightsville. The next day he was at the court house in York and stopped at John Lay's, who was to become a leader of York Methodism. He was a trustee of the church – and when he died in 1844 at the age of 73, he had been an active member there for more than 40 years. From Lay's he rode to Weirick Pentz's – then it was just north of town, but now the site is within the present city limits. This was a favorite “rest day retreat” for Asbury, and he sometimes had pangs of conscience for enjoying all of the comforts these German people gave him in their home. Tuesday he spent writing letters at Pentz's. Wednesday morning he preached at the chapel in York in the morning, and he spent the evening at James Worley's.

Thursday he came to the Conewago Creek and preached at the home of widow Holloper. Mrs. Martha Holloper lived not far from the present village of Wellsville and conducted a private school where the Kralltown and Wellsville roads join. Robert Ayres refers in his journal to the Hollopeters, who seemed to have influenced him as a young Methodist convert. Mrs. Holloper, a 1781 covert of freeborn Garrettson, left a remarkable record and was known as a teacher of the Indians who remained in that part of York county. The early Methodists at Wellsville included a number of converted Indians, one family of whom became influential as leaders in the church.

On Friday, Asbury and Boehm came to Carlisle for the quarterly meeting. Boehm preached Friday evening. Asbury preached at 11 Saturday morning, and Wilson Lee preached in the evening. “On the Sabbath we had a prayer meeting at 5 o'clock [a.m.!].” James Smith (presiding elder of Susquehanna District, of which Carlisle was a part) preached at 8 o'clock, Asbury followed him with a sermon, and Lee preached in the afternoon. Between preaching services they

generous doses of gross discouragement – on account of which they almost decided to go back to farming. But before such a decision was finalized, a courageous young woman at Shippensburg influenced the Roberts not to give up the work. The story is worth repeating here: *The junior preacher on Carlisle circuit in 1801, the year before Roberts traveled it, was John Walls – who like Roberts had just been admitted on trial in the conference. He came from one of the classes in York county and, as many beginners in those days were appointed to do, was traveling his “home circuit.” This was the real test of their calls and intentions. Walls was married, too, and the hardships of the circuit were more than they could bear – so Walls went into business in Shippensburg and did not continue in the ministry. Apparently Mrs. Walls regretted their decision. Now she observed their successors facing the same situation. Sister Walls made history in what was probably the most effectual counseling she every offered to anybody. She talked to the young and discouraged circuit rider and his wife, telling Rev. and Mrs. Roberts that she and her husband had made a great mistake in giving up and that they should not make the same mistake if indeed they truly felt the call of God to the work. That turned the tide, and Robert E. Roberts was saved to become one of the pioneer bishops of Methodism. He was the first married bishop -- elected shortly after the death of Asbury, who likely would never have permitted such.*

conducted the business of the quarterly conference, sometimes including one or two church trials. Such was the schedule of the quarterly meeting.

On Monday, August 1, Asbury dined at David Snyder's "near a place called Newville" and preached to those who gathered there. Snyder was a United Brethren minister whose home was always open to pioneer preachers itinerating through the valley. Afterwards he hurried on to Shippensburg and preached to a crowded house in the evening. The next morning he and Boehm set out at 4 o'clock to cross the mountains toward Bedford – passing through Strasburg and Fannettsburg, where they stopped to rest. The trip was difficult because of intense heat, rugged mountains, and a wasting dysentery. This is essentially the route of the present Pennsylvania Turnpike, but Asbury had to cross the mountains instead of tunneling through.

At this point in his journal, Asbury soliloquizes upon this territory in these words: "I feel and have felt thirty-two years for Pennsylvania – the most wealthy and the most careless about God, and the things of God. But I hope God will shake the State and the Church. There are now upwards of twenty German preachers somehow connected with Mr. Philip Otterbein and Martin Boehm – but they want [lack] authority, and the Church wants [lacks] discipline." He was thinking of the failure of the Methodists to reach the rank and file of the German-speaking Pennsylvanians, and hoping for a better future for these independent people long called "German Methodists" – even after they had become "The United Brethren in Christ Church."

On Wednesday they came to David Fields'. Here they "fed," and Wilson Lee left them to go to the Fort Littleton quarterly meeting. Asbury felt that the people would be disappointed in him for not appearing there, but he could not "stay one hundred miles in the rear of my appointments for such a purpose." After the eight mile climb of Sideling Hill, they stopped at Mr. Edward Head's "house of entertainment" for the night. Thursday, August 4th, they passed through Bedford County and over the Juniata River into Berlin, Somerset County.

The year 1803 is significant in Union County as the date the first log meeting house was erected by the Methodists on Northumberland circuit. Erected in Mifflinburg, it was called Youngmanstown Chapel for many years – for that was the original name of the village. Legally this church, which was used for fifty years before its successor was built, was called "The Communion Christian Church" – although its trustees were Methodists, for it was under the care and direction of Methodists who wanted any other body of Christians who had no other building to be welcome there. A few decades later, the quarterly conference directed the two original trustees Michael Lincoln and George Waggoner to change the title to the Methodist Episcopal Church.

It is conjectured with good reason that these Methodists wanted to provide a place for their Evangelical and United Brethren friends to worship – since they had no buildings of their own as yet. These German groups had entered Buffalo Valley and gained a following – especially in the neighborhood of Martin and Jacob Dreisbach's, in whose home quarterly meetings of all three groups of

“Methodists” (i.e., the English Methodists [ME], the German Methodists [UB], the Albright Methodists [EV]) were held. Christian Newcomer of the UB’s Brethren conducted a quarterly meeting at Dreisbach’s at which he preached in German, a companion preached in German, and “Mr. Farley, a Methodist, preached in English.” Mr. Farley was the leader of the White Deer Hole Valley (Allenwood) class, and his home was on the mountain which forms the northern boundary of Buffalo Valley. The EV’s also held meetings there, including their first (1816) General Conference.²² There is little doubt that UB and EV preachers were not welcomed at the established Lutheran or Reformed buildings²³ – either at Dreisbach’s Church on the Dreisbach farm, or at St. Elias’ (named for Elias Youngman, founder of the village) in Youngmanstown.

The conference minutes for 1803 also show Fort Littleton as a new circuit in the Susquehanna District of the Philadelphia Conference – along with Northumberland, Wyoming, Dauphin, Huntingdon and Carlisle. This new appointment included parts of the old Huntingdon and Carlisle circuits, along with a number of Maryland locations. Tioga circuit is now in the Genesee District of the Philadelphia Conference.

New classes and preaching places were opening up now in many locations, some of which never did develop into societies or churches. The Manor Hill class in Huntingdon County was one which continued, and so did the one at nearby Donation – although the latter may have been discontinued for a time before it was permanently established. The histories of the churches at Gettysburg in Adams County and Franklinville in Centre County also report that the first preaching was begun at these places about this year.

1804 The Susquehanna District was moved from Philadelphia to Baltimore Conference this year. Juniata circuit, which had first been named in 1784 and then deleted from the list after two years, is now re-named as a preacher’s appointment – although no one was assigned at the time. The preacher on Fort

²² That the Evangelicals eventually won the Dreisbachs is evident from the fact that John, the 18 year old son of Jacob was licensed to preach at a conference at their home, and he later became the first editor of church literature of the Evangelical Association. After the death of Jacob Albright, he was considered the strongest leader in the denomination. Without doubt, it was John Dresibach who induced the Evangelicals to locate their first church building across the mountain at New Berlin – and to start their first printing plant there. Later this was the site of the denomination’s first seminary/academy.

²³ The Dreisbach story reaches beyond “Methodist” groups, for on their farm was erected a log building named Dreisbach’s Church – used jointly by the Lutherans and German Reformed of the vicinity. About the turn of the century, however, both of these denominations were declining in membership and interest there. The reason was that the Reformed Church had a preacher who was promoting the same “experimental religion” and unconventional methods of public worship as the United Brethren. This disturbed the leadership of the older denominations, as their losses to the “new fanatical religion” were damaging to their churches. This preacher, the Rev. John George Pfrimmer, was referred to in histories of the German Reformed Church [viz., Harbaugh’s The Fathers of the Reformed Church] as “the apostate Pfrimmer” – but in United Brethren church history as “the sainted Father Pfrimmer.”

Littleton circuit likely took care of some of the preaching places, with the help of local preachers. The records of Brush Creek Valley indicate that David Best, a preacher on Fort Littleton circuit, organized a class this year at the mill of Ephraim Akers – a place where preaching services had been held for some years.

William Colbert was presiding elder of Genesee District, Philadelphia Conference, and mentions holding a quarterly meeting at the meeting house (Old Burlington) on Sugar Creek and staying over night at Joseph Ballard's. He said that Elisha Cole preached one of the sermons there. Samuel Cole's, Elisha Cole's, Lawrence's and Hollenbeck's near Wyalusing were some of the Tioga circuit preaching places.

Bald Eagle Chapel was built this year at Philip Antes' and dedicated, although unfinished, the next spring. This class has had continuous existence as an organization from 1787 to the present. Several years ago, after the membership had declined to but a few, an evangelistic effort among the many new residents of that now growing community resulted in about 60 new members and assures it of new prosperity and spiritual vitality.

1805 Lycoming Chapel, a small frame structure built on land which Amariah Sutton had designated for church and cemetery purposes, was first used this year. This is the site of the present Calvary Church in Williamsport. The first quarterly meeting of Northumberland circuit was held there June 15 and 16.

How many chapels stood within our territory at this time, we cannot be sure. A 1/31/1918 *Christian Advocate* article, part of a series by James Mudge titled "A Brief History of the People Called Methodists," notes that "previous to 1785 only 10 chapels had been built north of Maryland, while 55 had been built in and south of it." Rock Chapel in Adams County was one of these ten earliest. Fort Littleton had a chapel, and Asbury preached in it this year. Three Springs had a chapel about 1790. One was erected this year at Coaldale in Bedford County, and there may have been others. In addition, a class was organized this year at Waynesboro – and preaching was started at such places as Dillsburg, Lawrenceville, New Albany, Waterville and Tombs Run (on Pine Creek).

Once again Francis Asbury and his companions came through Lancaster (which was "still unpropitious to Methodism"), crossed the river at Marietta, and came into York. He spent a day at Weirick Pentz's and left his blessing upon them. Instead of going to Carlisle, where they apparently were expected, Asbury changed his mind and his course to ride through East Berlin and arrive at Rock Chapel – where he put up about a half mile from the chapel at the home of Isaac Haar, the first class leader there. The next day he rode to Shippensburg, but his journal does not whether or not he preached there. On Friday he headed westward, as usual, across the mountains and stopped at John Thompson's in Burnt Cabins Valley.²⁴

²⁴ Since the Thompson house was an important one to Methodism in this conference, let me here risk a trial at identification. It is well-known that there are many errors in names, dates, texts, etc.

This year Asbury did not disappoint the people at Fort Littleton, as he did on his last trip – and he spent Saturday there reading, writing and resting. On the Sabbath at Fort Littleton Chapel he notes “we had a feeling, melting season” and adds that “we lodged with Father Ramsey – an exceeding kind people.”

On Monday August 19, 1805, Asbury reached Bedford and “had a fiddle and flute to enliven our prayer and assist our meditation. I had but little rest.” The local inn must have been a lively place, and he was either lodged in it or too near to it for comfort. Up and away before daylight, he rode 16 miles and got to Berlin in Somerset County, where he preached.

The great revival on the North Branch of the Susquehanna took place this year. It began at Briar Creek, home of the Bowmans, and the classes at Berwick and many other places date their origin to this tremendously moving time.

This was also the year of the first camp meeting of record within our bounds. It was held in August, about three miles southeast of Milton. The preachers of Wyoming circuit joined with those of Northumberland to conduct this innovation which proved to have such a dramatic impact upon the community and the church. The conference archives contain a description of this early camp meeting in the words of one of the preachers who was present, Joseph Carson.

1806 Preaching began this year at Mifflinville, and at other places near to Briar Creek in the North Branch Valley. Methodist membership of circuits involved in our purview for the year 1806 are given in the General Minutes as follows:

<u>name of circuit</u>	<u>white members</u>	<u>colored members</u>
Northumberland	518	5
Carlisle	525	55
Huntingdon	398	1
Littleton	453	2
Juniata	105	3
Tioga	356	1
Hartford (mostly MD)	781	370

in Asbury’s journal – due likely to his writing it up days at a time, perhaps on rest days. It is quite possible that instead of “John” he meant Isaac Thompson of near Burnt Cabins, who gave the land and was responsible for building the first log meeting house in this valley. Isaac Thompson died on January 4, 1843, at the age of 81. His obituary quotes his testimony as follows: “I was born 6 of April 1762 in Chester County Pa, and moved to this place in 1788. In March 1791 I was converted under the sermon of John Rowen, the first sermon every preached in my house. I obtained sanctification in 1803.” His pastor writes thus: “He was for forty years the leader of one or two classes. He was a steward for forty-four years, and recording steward for twenty-four years. *Asbury accepted his hospitality* [italics added]. Having no children, he made the M.E. Church his heir, giving half of his real estate to the Missionary Society and the other half to the Preacher’s Aid Society of the Baltimore Conference... Father Thompson’s has long been known as the traveling preachers’ home.” In addition, Lytle’s 1876 History of Huntingdon County says that “the first log church of the Methodists, built two miles from Burnt Cabins, was erected on lands of Isaac Thompson, built largely by his means.” As “John” Thompson is otherwise unknown, we assume that Asbury was referring to Isaac.

This year Lycoming circuit now appears, having been separated from Northumberland circuit. The classes sending in “quarterage” for 1806 on Lycoming circuit included Loyalsock (between Williamsport and Montoursville), Lycoming Chapel (Williamsport), Henry Thomas’ (Larry’s Creek), Benjamin Beard’s (Liberty), Philip Antes’ (Bald Eagle Valley), Richard Gunsaulus’ (Beech Creek), Logan’s Branch (near Bellefonte), Sencer’s (Unionville), Centre Furnace (State College), Robert Pennington’s (Penn’s Valley), Nicholas Egbert’s (near Forest Hill, Union County), Youngmanstown (Mifflinburg), John Thompson’s (Buffalo Valley, near Mifflinburg), Farley’s (White Deer Hole Valley = Allenwood), and Snider’s (near Elimsport). This does not indicate all the preaching places, but only the classes whose leaders had brought “quarterage” for the support of the preachers. Among the many intervening places that had regular preaching ministry, for example, were Waterville and other Pine Creek homes – where John Thomas (then the local preacher son of Henry Thomas of Larry’s Creek, but later a member of Baltimore Conference for about 60 years) is said to have started preaching by 1805.

Timothy Lee and Jesse Pinnell were the circuit preachers on Lycoming circuit that year. Lee was a ministerial son of Bald Eagle class and became the father of the notable Joseph S. Lee, evangelistic preacher of the Baltimore Conference and founder of the Lee family of prominent Methodist leaders at Clearfield. Timothy Lee established several additional places in Penn’s Valley. It was he who, being unable to find a place at Milheim in which to preach, stood on a stump in the village and began to sing hymns – which attracted a crowd and led to a revival and the organization of a church.

1807 Bald Eagle circuit appears among the appointments this year, with Edward Matthews as the preacher in charge, but Lycoming and Bald Eagle appear to have continued together as one circuit. The next year it does not appear among the appointments – nor does it re-appear until 1815, when it is permanently cut off from Lycoming circuit.

This was the year that the first Methodist preaching reached into the western mountains as far as Philipsburg, and southward into Mercersburg. At New Albany in Bradford County a class was now organized, and at Milton (where there had been a class for four or five years) a log meeting house was erected. This was also the memorable year in which the brothers Christian and Thomas Bowman of Briar Creek, near Berwick, were ordained by Asbury at the Forty-Fort camp meeting. The Bowmans had been converts of Asbury while they still lived near the Delaware Water Gap in Northampton County prior to 1792.

That significant journey of Asbury through the area is recorded in his journal. Coming from an extraordinarily difficult time in Chemung and Tioga counties in New York, Asbury and Henry Boehm rode to Tioga in Bradford County PA on July 13. They had dinner at “Brother Shippey’s, a blacksmith who held meetings in his house.” The next stop was at Daniel Minier’s, two miles south of Tioga Point [Athens], on Queen Esther’s Flat. Here they lodged. On

Tuesday the 14th they rode to Judge Obadiah Gore's at Ulster, where Asbury preached and stayed the night. On Wednesday they arrived at Wyalusing, after difficulties with their carriage over a precipitous stretch of road, and stayed at Major Gaylord's on the north side of Wyalusing Creek. It was on this trip through the present Wyoming Conference territory that on Sunday, July 19, Asbury ordained Thomas and Christian Bowman in the woods near Forty-Fort – in a rainstorm which “scattered the flock.” Decades later a Methodist woman wrote that she had held an umbrella over the Bishop while he ordained the Bowmans.

In one week, Asbury and Boehm traveled through Allentown, Kutztown, Reading, Soudersburg, Lancaster and Columbia. On Monday, July 26th, they came to Little York. Asbury spent the week writing letters and catching up on his journal. On Sunday, August 1, he preached in the chapel at York to about 600 hearers. He spoke again in the afternoon – “longer than in the morning,” when he said that he had been “short and temperate.” He loved the hospitality of the Weirick Pentz family, near the town, where he said he had his “paradise.” It seems his conscience bothered him a little, for he noted “I now fare sumptuously every day.” Despite his English background, Asbury apparently enjoyed Pennsylvania Dutch cooking.

On Tuesday, August 4, they rode to George Nailor's near Dover, but went on and spent the night at the widow Hollopeter's near Wellsville. On Wednesday Asbury preached at Stickle's school house towards Lewisberry, a long-time preaching place on Carlisle circuit, “to a full room for about an hour.” That evening they lodged in Lewisberry. “Thursday brought us through an obscure town to Brother Weber's.” This was not Shiremanstown, as the new edition of Asbury's Journal (footnote 102 on page 551 of Volume II) suggests, but Lisburn that he traveled through to visit the “Casper Webers, Germans in their first love.” The Webers lived at their mill along Yellow Breeches Creek, near the site of today's White Hill Correctional Institution.²⁵

August 8 and 9 was the quarterly meeting in Carlisle. On the Sabbath Asbury preached both morning and afternoon, “my body faint; my spirit fervent.” The next day he preached at Shippensburg and ordained the class leader John Davis a local deacon. A few years later John Davis' son Samuel would become an itinerant in the Baltimore Conference. On Monday night Asbury lodged with

²⁵ This surname anglicized to “Weaver.” Casper, who had settled here before the Revolution, died prior to 1780. Asbury was apparently visiting the son who lived on the family homestead – there were two sons, and neither was named Casper. The site was still known as locally as “Casper Weaver's Mill.” Later Carlisle circuit riders reported regular rounds from Lewisberry to Lisburn to Weaver's. On February 1, 1811, for example, Nathaniel Mills “rode from here [Lisburn] to Brother Weaver's, where I had a considerable number but some of them were very trifling. But in class meeting some got very happy. Friday: Rode in company with Brothers Weaver and Crist into Carlisle, where was a meeting of trustees to consult about building a new meeting house in Carlisle.” This was likely Peter Weaver, grandson of Casper, who was listed as a trustee of the Carlisle church at a later date. The Weaver class appears to have disbanded by 1827.

John Scott, “one of my hearers thirty years ago in Chester County, now warm in the cause of God.”

On Tuesday the Bishop began the arduous toil of crossing the three mountains. At Fort Littleton, he “dined with the junior and lodged with the senior Ramsay.” A rainy trip into Bedford on Wednesday, August 12th, brought him to the stage house – where the proprietor Mr. Graham gave him such kind and free hospitality as he had not received in any other public house in a year. From there Asbury and Boehm rode to Berlin, heading westward toward Pittsburgh.

1808 This year for the first time there is a Carlisle District in Baltimore Conference. It was composed of Harford, Carlisle, Littleton, Juniata, Huntingdon and Aughwick circuits – the last named being a new circuit which covered the territory drained by the Aughwick Creek. This valley extended from Burnt Cabins and Fort Littleton to Newton Hamilton. The new circuit was west of Juniata circuit and east of Huntingdon circuit, although the boundaries were not definitely fixed.

The first Methodist service of record in Harrisburg was held in 1808. And the Old Stone Church at Briar Creek was built this year by Rev. Thomas Bowman and his sons – with the help of very few others.

1809 At the Baltimore Conference held in Harrisonburg VA on March 2, 1809, Carlisle District now reported 2,228 white and 421 colored members by circuits as follows: Harford, 578 and 362; Carlisle, 536 and 51; Littleton, 406 and 2; Juniata, 362 and 0; Huntingdon, 174 and 3; Aughwick, 172 and 3. At the Philadelphia Conference held in Philadelphia on April 9, 1809, Susquehanna District reported 3,629 white and 21 colored members by circuits now within our conference as follows: Northumberland, 532 total; Lycoming, 553 and 14; Tioga 341 and 2.

On Friday, July 21st, two years and one week after his last visit there, Asbury was resting at Dr. Stephen Hopkins’ in Tioga Point [Athens]. Because of high water he could not proceed, and so he came back and called a meeting. On Saturday morning they were at Judge Obadiah Gore’s again, but tarried only briefly. Again they go through Wilkes Barre, Nazareth, Bethlehem, Allentown and on to Martin Boehm’s in Lancaster County. Then it was through Lancaster and on to York, where Asbury preached at 6 o’clock in the evening on Saturday July 29th and on Sunday. On this trip Asbury had his usual letters to write, but he could tarry only a day. By Tuesday evening at 8 o’clock he was preaching in Carlisle, having “alighted, stopped, talked, ate and prayed” twice on the way.

Shippensburg welcomed him on Wednesday, August 2nd, but he had a blistered knee which prevented him from standing to preach or kneeling to pray. By Thursday, never-the-less, he was over the mountains and preaching to a few hearers at Fort Littleton – stopping on the way at Thompson’s near Burnt Cabins, and lodging at Ramsay’s – “James Hunter’s house and home.” James Hunter was presiding elder of Carlisle District. He traveled with Asbury to Bedford Saturday,

and they lodged at Stephenson's. Sunday Asbury preached in the court house "by necessity, not choice." Without naming James Hunter, he records: "There was but one indecorous thing observed; a presiding elder put his feet upon the banister of my pulpit whilst I was preaching, and it was like a thorn in my flesh until they were taken down." By Monday evening Asbury was in Berlin and heading west.

This year preaching services were held more or less regularly on Tioga circuit at Tioga, Covington and Lawrenceville – largely by Caleb Boyer, who was made an elder at the Christmas Conference of 1784 and who had left the itinerancy and moved from Delaware to settle near Wellsboro. This was also the year the first preaching was held in the Robbins barn in Greenwood township, Columbia County – later developing into the Greenwood Church. The same preacher is said to have started to preach at West Creek, where a church was built – but later sold by the society when they moved into the nearby town of Benton. Bloody Run [Everett] became a preaching place this year also.

Classes were organized this year at Greenwood, Bloody Run, Duncannon (Young's Church), Town Hill and Lawrenceville. And Bedford circuit now appears among the Carlisle District assignments – reporting to the next (1810) conference with 71 white and 2 colored members. Littleton and Juniata circuits decreased in members during the last year, while Huntingdon circuit more than doubled – probably indicating a re-adjustments in the circuit boundaries.

1810 This year the first circuit rider began to preach "on the mountain top." This is the Clearfield-Philipsburg area, and it was part of the Carlisle District of Baltimore Conference. Curwensville and Moshannon appears now as a circuit for the first time.

The first preaching is recorded now at Black Creek in Luzerne County and at Hanover and Shrewsbury (then called Strasburg) in York County. And the first classes were organized at Harrisburg (by pastors Thomas Boring and John Fernan of Dauphin circuit) and at Black Creek (by the pastors of Wyoming circuit).

Meeting houses were erected at Wellsville, Warrior's Mark and Shirleysburg. At Gatchelville, Nathaniel Mills records preaching in the Prospect Meeting House – which must have been built either this year or earlier.

Beginning July 20th at Lyons, Ontario County NY, Bishop Asbury conducted a special session for the purpose of organizing a new Conference to be called Genesee – "composed of Susquehanna, Cayuga, Upper and Lower Canada districts." Having concluded this historic meeting, Asbury and his traveling companion Henry Boehm began the trip "down country" by taking the shortest (but not the easiest) route from north of Seneca Lake to the southern appointments which awaited him.

Thursday July 26th they arrived at Captain Benjamin Clarke's at Ulster. They had traveled 140 miles in 3½ days and were now on the recently constructed Genesee Trail – which connected the Genesee country and the Susquehanna Valley (at Muncy). The road had been opened about seven or eight years prior, but was still scarcely more than a horse path between the mountains. The feeble

bishop rode in a two-wheeled sulky which proved to be too wide for the road at some places. To protect him from the danger of being thrown out, Boehm drove the sulky over the more treacherous stretches while Asbury rode Boehm's horse. The sulky did overturn at least once – slightly injuring Boehm, while Asbury was on his sure-footed mount.

Making as much haste as possible, they pressed onward until high streams made fording impossible. They had passed the Eldreds at present-day Eldredsville, disapproving of their following the Unitarian views of Dr. Priestly (now living at Northumberland), and soon found themselves stranded in the sparsely settled wilderness of Sullivan County. At an impassable stream near present Lincoln Falls, they were found by John Bown and taken to his cabin. To this day the descendants of John Bown point out the site of their pioneer immigrant ancestor's cabin and a large rock outside the doorway where Asbury sat to read his Bible and pray. Pilgrimages are made to this site by the youth who attend summer events at Camp Loyalsock.²⁶

By Tuesday, the waters having receded somewhat, the itinerants were able to cross the Loyalsock with the aid of a canoe and they finally came to Muncy Creek and Muncy Town, then called Pennsborough. While Asbury said they came to "Muddy Creek," he probably meant Muncy Creek. They may have traveled, however, all the way to Muddy Run – which empties into the Susquehanna above Milton. In that case, they probably lodged with the Vincents – who had erected their mill on that stream and were the forebears of John Heyl Vincent, educator and bishop of the Methodist Church.

Asbury says that on Wednesday they arrived at Northumberland and lodged there. They started out early Thursday morning, crossed the Susquehanna, rode down the west bank of the river past Selinsgrove and Liverpool to Moorhead's Ferry – which they used to get back to the east side of the river. Operating between Liverpool and Millersburg, this was the antecedent of Montgomery's Ferry and is now known popularly as the Millersburg Ferry.

They dined Thursday with the Fergusons, "Methodists lately from Ireland" who had recently settled in Dauphin. This family came from Ireland in 1800 and was instrumental in starting the Dauphin circuit in 1801. By 1802 preaching was started in Harrisburg, even though the first class was not organized until Asbury's visit in 1810. Rev. William G. Ferguson (1832-1898), a leading member in the Central Pennsylvania Conference, was a grandson of Asbury's host on this occasion. These Dauphin Fergusons are mentioned in one history of Harrisburg Methodism as being influential in starting the first class there. The role that

²⁶ Bown and his family were said to have been Methodists in England, and they later affiliated themselves with American Methodism as soon as classes were formed at Forksville and Hillsgrove. Rev. Charles L. Bown, a grandson of Asbury's host, was a longtime member of the Genesee Conference. The bodies of John Bown and numerous of his family lie in the Hillsgrove cemetery. [The full story of this trip and Asbury's temporary refuge with Bown is found in "Bishop Asbury's Rock" by Adona Sick on pages 44-48 of the 1999 volume of *The Chronicle*. –ed.]

Asbury's visit here played in what transpired in Harrisburg is not mentioned, but it may have been significant.

After a swing to Lancaster for the Sabbath, where he preached both morning and evening, Asbury came to Columbia on Monday and preached there at twelve o'clock noon. Not resting, he and Boehm pushed on to York the next day and called on friends Nailor and Wall (north of York, probably at Dover). They stopped for the night at Casper Weaver's on the Yellow Breeches near Mill Town [White Hill]. From Weaver's they went into Carlisle on Wednesday, where Asbury drew plans for a one-story 70x45 chapel costing \$2000. Apparently the Carlisle people did not like his plan, for in 1815 they dedicated a two-story 60x45 brick church.

On Thursday Asbury was oppressed by the heat as he rode to Shippensburg, where he lodged with brother Reid and preached in "our improved chapel." On Friday "our neat little chapel" at Chambersburg was not large enough to accommodate the people, and so Asbury preached in the courthouse.

The Fort Littleton congregation was again favored to have Asbury preach in its chapel on Sunday, August 12 – but Asbury found it "a burden" to do so, even though he "enjoyed a gracious season" there. The trip over Sideling Hill was hot, dusty, and rocky going. He found new life at Bloody Run [Everett] and declares that henceforth it shall be "New Hope." He preached at Barndollar Tavern, "where seven in the family now fear and worship God... Once a very wicked place, but O, what hath God wrought!"

Tuesday Asbury and Boehm had their horses re-shod at Bloody Run before leaving for Bedford. Time did not permit preaching there, but they dined with "brother Stevens." This was likely David Stevens, who had this year taken a supernumerary relation after having served as preacher in charge on Juniata circuit in 1808 and on Huntingdon circuit in 1809. Fourteen miles farther on they spent the night at Metzoffer's, likely a public house. On Wednesday they rode over the Alleghenies to Berlin in Somerset County.

The actual extent of the Carlisle circuit in 1810 is of interest, and we find the listing of those preaching places in the journal of Nathaniel Mills – who traveled that circuit from December 5 until the April 1811 annual conference. Asbury had urged all his preachers to make records, and to write descriptions of the locations of their classes and preaching places – and Nathaniel Mills was one who followed his suggestions carefully. His journal²⁷ has been preserved, and we

²⁷ Nathaniel Mills had been appointed to Harford circuit at the annual conference which met in Baltimore in March. His journal also names all the preaching places on that circuit. The following excerpts from April-May 1810 relate only to those Pennsylvania preaching places of historical importance to our conference territory.

•Mon 4/2 – "Rode to Henry Manifold's in Pennsylvania, about 8 miles [from Ingram's, his previous Maryland stop]. He is class leader at Prospect."

•Tue 4/3 – "Rode over to old Brother Ewing's." Alexander Ewing was one of Colbert's converts in 1791. He had several daughter in the society, and his son James Ewing was a traveling preacher who had four sons that became Methodist preachers. Mrs. Alexander Ewing probably did not

can rather clearly follow the rounds of several of the early circuits he traveled. The following records are for his first round on Carlisle circuit, beginning in December 1810.

- Wed 12/5 – “by candlelight preached to a clever congregation of attentive hearers” at Lewisberry.
- Thu 12/5 – rode six 6 miles to Lisburn, where very few turned out to hear him because of the poor roads. In the evening he rode to Weaver’s, on the Yellow Breeches near present White Hill, and preached there.
- Fri 12/7 – rode into Carlisle and attended a prayer meeting in the evening.
- Sat 12/8 – spent in Carlisle reading and visiting. He “had a comfortable time with a family who moved from the Eastern Shore (a relative of Major Taylor’s).”
- Sun 12/9 – met a class at 10:30, preached at 12 noon, met another class (“colored people”) at 3, preached again by candlelight. “A good deal of exercise – but as my day was, so was my strength. Only there appeared too much formality to run there the various duties and exercises of the day – so that neither myself nor the people were so much profited as we could have been, had there been more spirituality in the devotions of the day. Lord be merciful to my weakness and pardon my infirmities.”

leave the Presbyterian Church of which she was a member. Two of their daughters married brothers James and Tobias Reiley, who had been their pastor on Harford circuit.

- Wed 4/4 – “Father Ewing rode with me to show me the road. Reached Brother Low’s.” This was along the road from Baltimore to York, south of present Shrewsbury. They used a building called Low’s Meeting House prior to 1815, when the society erected Rock Chapel.
- Thu 4/5 – “At 12, preached at Low’s.”
- Fri 4/6 – “Class meeting.”
- Sat 4/7 – “At Brother Meredith’s.” Just below the Mason-Dixon Line, Meredith’s Meeting House was later called West Liberty appointment.
- Sun 4/29 – “Rode up to Prospect.”
- Mon 4/30 – “Rode to A. Ewing’s”
- Tue 5/1 – “Rode to a new place [un-named] and up to Ewing’s in the evening.”
- Wed 5/2 – “Rode to Brother Low’s.”
- Thu 5/3 – “Preached at Low’s.”

[travels in Maryland]

Tue 5/29 – “Rode to old Brother Ewing’s.”

Wed 5/30 – “Spent at Brother Ewing’s, and attended prayer meeting in the evening at Prospect Meeting House.” As Prospect Meeting House is the original name of the Gatchelville Church, this indicates that a building had been erected there by 1810.

●In the fall Mills describes a camp meeting at Low’s camp ground at which 3000 were present, with 259 white and 49 colored members taking communion. Among the local and traveling preachers who attended was Henry Lenhart, who migrated to Williamsport the next year and became a prominent there as an influential merchant, manufacturer of hats, local politician, and leading Mason – as well as an effective and useful local preacher. [See *The Chronicle* for 1999, page 49, for the story of his son Chaplain John L. Lenhart, who died when the battleship Cumberland was sunk by the celebrated Monitor at Hampton Roads in 1862 – ed.]

- Mon 12/10 – rode out of Carlisle about 6 miles to brother Heikes, “a Dutchman who wears his beard,” and preached by candlelight.
- Tue 12/11 – rode about 16 miles to Shippensburg and slept “at one Hunt, who came from England and who helps a cotton manufactory.”
- Wed 12/12 – preached in Shippensburg by candlelight to a small congregation.
- Thu 12/13 – left Shippensburg, rode to Chambersburg, and called on brother Johns.
- Fri 12/14 – rode 15 miles to Waynesboro, preached by candlelight, and met the class after the service.
- Sat 12/15 – rode back to Chambersburg.
- Sun 12/16 – preached in Chambersburg at 11, met the class after the service, rode to Shippensburg, and preached by candlelight. “Brother Stevens gave a moving exhortation afterwards.” This was undoubtedly David Stevens, who was a supernumerary this year.
- Mon 12/17 – spent in Shippensburg. “By candlelight attended a singing meeting the society holds to improve themselves in that noble part of the divine service.”
- Tue 12/18 – visited families in the country “and found it good for me and I hope not in vain for them.” Then he preached by candlelight back in Shippensburg.
- Wed 12/19 – rode 2 miles out of Shippensburg to brother Meshey’s and “preached to a clever company of willing hearers.”
- Thu 12/20 – rode to Carlisle.
- Fri 12/21 – waited until 2 o’clock for the other senior preacher on the circuit, James Reid, who never came. He then rode out to “friend Kenega’s” at or near Mt. Holly Springs to preach and meet the class after the service.
- Sat 12/22 – rode 12-14 miles “on a lonesome road” to the neighborhood of Rock Chapel and called on Henry Montorff.
- Sun 12/23 – preached at Rock Chapel, “a new [?] preaching house” where “there has been a good congregation, but it is much scattered of late by the preachers’ neglecting of them and making disappointments.”
- Mon 12/24 – rode to East Berlin and spent the evening with “brother S, oppressed in mind.”
- Tue 12/25 – was “some relieved” to preach in East Berlin on Christmas day from Isaiah 9:6 on “Unto us a child is born...” He preached again in the evening to a larger congregation “and with greater liberty.”
- Wed 12/26 – traveled to Volgemuth’s, near Wellsville.
- Thu 12/27 – traveled to Worley’s, in York.
- Fri 12/28 – rode to Nailor’s, near York, and preached in the evening.
- Sat 12/29 – rode back to York
- Sun 12/30 – met the York class at 9:30, preached at 11 and by candlelight.
- Mon 12/31 – rode to brother Hollopeter’s, near Wellsville, “and preached to a few by candlelight, being the last day of 1810.”
- Tue 1/1/1811 – preached at noon at Maytown at Stickel’s school house and by candlelight at brother Pike’s.

●Wed 1/2 – completed his first round on the circuit by preaching in the evening in Lewisberry.

During the four-week circuit he had preached 26 times. As there were two preachers assigned to the circuit, each appointment typically had a preaching service every two weeks.

1811 Even though his age and infirmities are increased, Asbury makes his annual harvest-time trip through southern Pennsylvania. This year he visits York, East Berlin, Chambersburg, McConnellsburg and Bedford. Lewisberry, where Methodism was introduced by Freeborn Garrettson in 1781, now builds a church for worship.

On this trip the bishop elaborates very little in his journal, although he may have deleted incidents he considered personal and of no historical value when he edited it. Wednesday August 21st he preached in York. Thursday he went to East Berlin, dined there, and lodged at the “twenty-five mile house.” He probably did not visit Carlisle, and he appears not to have stopped in Shippensburg. He reached Chambersburg “very weak indeed.” On Sunday, nevertheless, he preached “at our old church,”²⁸ met the society, and preached again at 4 o’clock in the Presbyterian church. He noted that the people here “are so strict on the Lord’s Day in this town – we stop wagons which may attempt to travel through.” On Monday they kept their faces westward and traveled the mountainous road from St. Thomas to McConnellsburg and Bedford, where sheriff Jacob Bennett “was exceedingly kind, but strangely shy of our company.” Tuesday they left our bounds.

1812 Chambersburg circuit appears for the first time, in the Carlisle District of Baltimore Conference, and a number of its original preaching places were in Maryland. Shamokin circuit²⁹ also makes its initial appearance, in the Susquehanna District of Genesee Conference. Huntingdon and Moshannon circuits were combined this year. The first recorded preaching services were held by traveling preachers in Lewistown (Mifflin County), Jonestown (Columbia County) and Big Pond (Tioga County). The first class was organized at Lewisburg.

Membership figures illustrate the rapid growth of Methodism within our bounds. After Freeborn Garrettson opened Little York circuit in 1781, there were 90 members for that assignment – and that first membership report covered the

²⁸ When Asbury refers to “our old church,” he probably was thinking of the new one which was then in the process of erection. The first chapel was now proving too small. In 1803 this small society had only three members when Mrs. Nancy Seibert joined it. She came there from Baltimore, where she had originally been awakened under the preaching of Dr. Thomas Coke. Methodism was beginning to acquire some stature here and elsewhere, despite the fact that Methodists were frequently looked down upon as unconventional and uncultured people.

²⁹ While Shamokin is no longer within the Central Pennsylvania Conference, it was when Dr. Berkheimer was writing this paper. Similarly, the analysis in the following paragraphs fails to mention the work in Dauphin County – which was then in the Philadelphia Conference. – ed.

entire area of the present Central Pennsylvania Conference! By 1792 the conference territory included 250 on members Northumberland circuit, 215 on Huntingdon, 200 on Little York, 71 on Tioga, plus an indeterminate number of the 811 members on Harford circuit – for a total of 736+. In 1812 that same area now reports 589 members of Northumberland circuit, 569 on Carlisle, 486 on Tioga, 474 on Lycoming, 373 on Littleton, 313 on Huntingdon, 184 on Aughwick, 173 on Juniata, 96 on Bedford, and 46 on Moshannon – for a total of 3,303, not including those on the Harford and Allegheny circuits living within Pennsylvania.

While the territory was extensive, it was contained principally in two districts: the Carlisle District in Baltimore Conference, and Susquehanna District in Genesee Conference. Carlisle District had 8 circuits (including Carlisle, Littleton, Huntingdon, Aughwick, Juniata, Bedford and Moshannon from the above list) and extended from just north of Baltimore to several miles west of Clearfield. Susquehanna District had 10 circuits, including Northumberland, Tioga and Lycoming from the above list) and extended from Sunbury to Lake Ontario. Each presiding elder conducted four quarterly meetings on each circuit – and stayed over when the meetings became “protracted” beyond the usual two days. He was also expected to attend all the camp meetings in his district, usually preaching several times at each. The distances that had to be traveled on horse-back made the presiding elder’s task stupendous.³⁰

Even a trip around a single circuit was no easy task. In 1812 Nathaniel B. Mills traveled Littleton circuit, his journal for that year indicating the route and preaching places. Following the pattern of the day, the circuit was basically a figure eight that took four weeks to traverse – with two men assigned to travel the circuit so that they were typically on opposite loops and each outlying appointment received preaching every two weeks. The circuit was based at Fort Littleton and the nearby Fiddler house, from which three sons had entered the traveling ministry – John in 1784, David in 1789, and Noah in 1801. And each loop included key similarly dependable appointments that later became bases of circuits of their own.

- the eastern loop. From Fort Littleton to Isaac Thompson’s near Burnt Cabins, north up Tuscarora Valley Pohe’s, and east across to Widney’s and Concord³¹ at the top of Path Valley, south down Path Valley via Snyder’s and Ligo’s (sometimes preaching and traveling one mountain further east in Horse Valley) to Mercersberg, further south via West’s and Newson’s to Prather’s meeting house at Clear Spring Maryland. This is the southeastern limit of the circuit. From there it was back across Tuscarora mountain (or sometimes around its southern

³⁰ At this point Dr. Berkheimer relates the classic account of presiding elder George Harmon’s 1812 winter travels on the Susquehanna District. Because this appears beginning on page 9 of the 2002 volume of *The Chronicle*, it will not be reprinted here. – ed.

³¹ By 1838 a separate Concord appointment was formed, and a new figure eight circuit was created centered at Concord. The story of the development of this circuit is the major article in the 1997 volume of *The Chronicle*. – ed.

terminus) into Fulton County and through present McConnellsburg back to Fort Littleton.

- the western loop. North from Fort Littleton on the west side of Shade mountain to Cromwell's Works (Orbisonia), to Three Springs, to Duvall's³² on Broad Top, to McLaughlin's³³, across Ray's Hill to Robert Akers on Brush Creek, to Wells Valley, across Sideling Hill to Hamp's, and back to Fort Littleton.

Asbury's travels for 1812 found him within our conference boundaries for a single night. The 67-year-old bishop began the year in South Carolina and preached his way through North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania (eastern portion), New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts. Mid-way through the year, on July 1, he turned around to head south and west via New York, Pennsylvania (eastern portion), Maryland, Pennsylvania (western portion), Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina to end the year where he had begun it – in South Carolina. It was during his August swing to the west that he passed through the extreme southern end of York County on his way from eastern Pennsylvania to Maryland. His journal includes the following entries.

- Mon 8/17 – We crossed [the Susquehanna] at McCall's ferry and came to father Jones's.³⁴

- Tue 8/18 – We rode through the rain to John Low's,³⁵ dined, prayed and came away to Manchester [Maryland].

1813 This year Asbury's journal records visits at Bowman's at Briar Creek, at Gearhart's at Riverside, and at McIntyre's near Catawissa. On Thursday, July 22, accompanied by Bishop McKendree and J.C. French (his official traveling companion for the year), he arrived at Bowman's "travelsore, weary and in pain." He preached at the camp meeting there, but retired with a high fever after his turn in preaching. Again on the Sabbath he preached, but suffered intensely – and his journal gives an outline of his sermon.

Nevertheless, on Monday the party was up and away 22 miles to Danville. Here he met his old friend Mollie Wallace, wife of Daniel Montgomery, and finds

³² This was Dr. Jeremiah Duvall, the first physician and the first Methodist local preacher in these parts.

³³ The McLaughlins were the ancestors of Rev. John McLaughlin (Secretary of the Commission on Chaplains) and his sister Elizabeth (once the Children's Worker of our Conference) and the maternal ancestors of Reverends. J.E. Skillington and J.W. Skillington

³⁴ Ellis Jones, a member of Baltimore Conference since their earliest records of 1801, lived just north of the Mason-Dixon line.

³⁵ The significance of John Low to early area Methodism cannot be understated. On his Shrewsbury township property just north of the Mason-Dixon line were a meeting house, a camp ground and a burying ground. Because of his prominence, the entirety of his extended obituary which appeared in *The Christian Advocate and Journal* for March 29, 1848, is given in the appendix. It was submitted by Henry Doll, for many years a local preacher at Rock Chapel and Shrewsbury.

her much changed after 44 years.³⁶ They crossed the North Branch on Gearhart's ferry to get to present Riverside, where Revolutionary War worthy Captain Jacob Gearhart had settled on a grant of land. His son Jacob Gearhart Jr became a convert of Asbury, probably on this visit, and a prominent Methodist leader. His wife was a sister of the reverends Christian and Thomas Bowman of Briar Creek, and their labors helped sustain "the Gearhart appointment" through the decades to the place where a meeting house was erected about 1829. The congregation having since relocated into Riverside, that site a few miles towards Sunbury is now occupied by the remaining cemetery. At Gearhart's they lost a day looking for French's run-away horse.

It must have been on this trip that Joseph McIntyre was visited and converted by Asbury, for McIntyre's testimony was that he was converted to God through a visit of Asbury to him home. He lived south of Catawissa, along the road Asbury took that day on his way to Reading. He soon started a class in his home, later giving a corner of his farm and erecting thereon a Methodist meeting house – still called McIntyre's Church, the mother of Catawissa-area Methodism.³⁷

On Wednesday, July 21, the travelers started down the Reading pike at 6 o'clock in the morning and crossed into the territory of the Philadelphia Conference. By August 10th Asbury was in Little York by way of Columbia, but he does not comment on his visit or labors there. On the 11th he traveled toward Maryland – again going south to avoid the mountains of central Pennsylvania to travel west along the Potomac River and the National Road.

1814 Meeting houses were erected this year at Manor Hill and at "Father Pennington's" in Penn's Valley – and several others were authorized, as at Dunnstown. Chambersburg is now an appointment, in the Georgetown District of Baltimore Conference. Wyalusing is a new appointment, in the Susquehanna District of Genesee Conference.

Asbury returns to his westerly route through the central Pennsylvania mountains, but his journal includes only one sentence about the trip: "I have clambered over the rude mountains, passing through York and Chambersburg to Greensburg." A more detailed account of an episcopal visit to the area is given by George Harman, presiding elder of the vast Susquehanna District, describing his accompanying Bishop McKendree from New York state to Bloody Run [Everett].

³⁶ Berkheimer inserts "(note on Daniel M. and his wife)" at this point in his uncompleted manuscript. Elmer Clark's 1958 edition of The Journal of Francis Asbury for this date reads, "The wife of Daniel Montgomery is my old friend Molly Wallis. Yes, I saw her; but ah! How changed in forty-two years – time has been eighty years at work upon her wrinkled face." It seems like there is a story here, and that Charles Berkheimer was aware it, but efforts to uncover it for publication in this volume have not been successful. –ed.

³⁷ Berkheimer inserts "(note on local tradition about Shakespeare or Tewksbury Spring)" at this point in his uncompleted manuscript. It is not known what he had in mind. –ed.

This was the occasion when Bishop McKendree was forced to spend several weeks in Half Moon Valley, nursing a broken leg in the cabin of Peter Gray.³⁸

1815 This is the year of Asbury's last visit to our conference territory, and it shall supply the conclusion to this examination of our Methodist beginnings. On June 29th he crossed the new Columbia-Wrightsville bridge and came to York. Here he spent several days with "son Francis Hollingsworth" from near Baltimore, who had come to be the transcriber of the bishop's abridged journal.

Asbury's comments at this point about the document he has been writing are revealing. He acknowledges the importance of his journal as a record of the early history of Methodism in America. He says that they have approved it up to 1807. He deleted all that was purely personal and of no historical importance, he says, but the original without deletions would be of the keenest interest to us today. Unfortunately, it burned in the great 1836 Book Concern fire in New York.

On Friday, July 7, they came to Carlisle. Asbury remained to preach on Sunday in the new chapel, where "the truth was felt." On Monday, July 10, they arrived in Shippensburg – where Asbury felt his health better, despite the heat and the rough ride. They lodged with John Davis, a class leader and local preacher – whom Asbury had ordained a deacon. He had been a Methodist itinerant as a single man, but in 1815 he was the settled father of a daughter and five sons – one of whom, Samuel Davis³⁹, was now a traveling preacher on Monongahela circuit.

Tuesday Asbury was on a "crowded road" headed toward Fannettsburg, where he lodged at the tavern of William Anderson. By Wednesday he had made it over the third mountain to Fort Littleton and the home of James Hunter, presiding elder of Carlisle District. Here the travelers rested, but they lent their horses to help local farmers get in their harvest.

On Saturday, July 15, they rode 30 miles to Bloody Run [Everett], and Asbury felt better after the rest of the last few days. Apparently the church building was not quite finished, for the journal notes "we went up to the little chapel in the state it was, and said a few words to the people." It continues with, "We lodged at a grand tavern [Barndollar's] at night and paid pretty well for our shelter."

By Monday, July 17, they were in Bedford. The aged Asbury overcome with the heat again, Brother Bond preached while the bishop listened. Before another harvest season rolled around, Asbury's great soul had been garnered – and he was gathered to the Great Harvest Home "at four o'clock this afternoon, Sunday, March 31, 1816."

³⁸ While Berkheimer gives details of this incident in his manuscript, interested readers are referred to *The Chronicle* for 2001, where the complete and annotated story appears on pages 19-23. –ed.

³⁹ Samuel Davis served with unusual effectiveness for 8 years and died in 1822 while serving Foundry station in Washington DC. His obituary appears in the *General Minutes* for 1823.

Appendix - John Low, Senior: an extended obituary. Appearing in *The Christian Advocate and Journal* for March 29, 1848, this was submitted by Henry Doll – for many years a local preacher at Rock Chapel and Shrewsbury.

“This venerable patriarch was born in Shrewsbury township, York County Pa, near the Maryland Line on the 9th of June 1764, where he continued to reside until the day of his death. His father John Low was among the first to receive the Methodist preachers into his house, when scarcely an one would countenance them. The first preacher who preached in the neighborhood was Philip Gatch. This was in 1774 [sic]. He was invited by Mr. Lawson to preach in his house, who afterwards put up a school house on his land – but the property shortly after passing into other hands, the Methodist preachers were prohibited from holding meetings in it any longer.

“Being deprived of a preaching house, John Low, the elder, now stepped forward and invited them to preach at his house, which he fitted up with seats for the accommodation of the people – and prepared a stand for the preacher, which is still retained in the family as a relic of former days. During the winter they held their meetings in the house – the room in which I am now writing – and in the summer season they repaired to the barn. Thus they continued alternately in the house and the barn for the space of forty years, when through the exertion of the son John, and others, they succeeded in erecting a good substantial meeting house – on part of his own and Caleb Low’s land, called Rock Chapel, which was dedicated by Joseph Toy in the year 1816.

“Prior to the erecting of the chapel, many souls had been converted in the house and barn through the instrumentality of Methodist preachers, notwithstanding they were then despised. Among the converts of those days the subject of this notice is to be included, though not converted in the barn. About the time of the formation of the Harford circuit by John Cooper and George Hagerty, there was a meeting held at the house of Mr. Grover in the neighborhood of what is now called West Liberty, or Meredith’s meeting house. Here it was that John and his brother Isaac were converted. The following conference year, 1789, John Allen and John Rowan were appointed to the Harford circuit. Rowan, on the 23rd of September, founded a society of five persons [Henry Doll, Nancy Gibbs, Cassandra Sparks, Matthew Sparks and wife] – the nucleus of a large membership which has spread over a large section of the country. Before the year closed it had increased to 20, of which John Low was one.

“Of those who joined the society about the time he did, there are still a few who survive him – namely, his brother Isaac who is now in his 89th year, Grazell Fife aged 87, and Susannah Morris aged 80. From these relics of early Methodism we might still glean some reminiscences connected with the history of our branch of the Christian Church. But in a few years at most, they will have gone to join with those who have gone before them – when the opportunity will be gone forever. Had the writer been a little more particular in this respect, he might have gathered up much from the deceased while living, which possibly might have been interesting to those who survive him – but like many others, he neglected or did not appreciate the opportunity until it was too late.

“John Low, Senior, was extraordinary. There was scarcely one of the old preachers that he could not give some “passage in his life” – such was the tenacity of his memory, which continued to the last. He was remarkably communicative, and never seemed better pleased than when he had a preacher or some other of his friends around him. On a cold winter’s day with plenty of wood to feed the old Franklin stove, which those who visited him will recollect, he appeared to enjoy himself in recounting the

incidents with which his mind was stored relative to the rise and progress of Methodism in this country, especially in his own neighborhood.

“He was an ardent lover of the Church of his early choice – and was always pleased to hear of her prosperity, and grieved when she was menaced. He lived to see her pass through many difficulties and trials, but never despaired of her final triumph – provided there was no departure from these cardinal doctrines and forms of our holy religion, the inculcation and practice of which has been so signally blessed in the conversion and building up and salvation of thousands since the introduction of Methodism among us.

“It is somewhat remarkable that he was never confined to his bed by sickness but twice till his last affliction – once with a broken leg occasioned by the kick of a horse, and another time from a fall which deprived him of his senses. The affliction which terminated in his removal from time to eternity commenced on the 25th of January and continued until the 2nd of February, 1848, when without a doubt or lingering groan he breathed his last – in the 84th year of his age.

“He was a member of the M.E. Church upwards of 58 years, respected and beloved by all who knew him. For a number of years he acted in the capacity of a trustee and steward – and we might add sexton, for the meeting house being so contiguous to his dwelling he had the sole charge of rendering it comfortable for those who worshipped in it. He could well have adopted the language of the Psalmist who said, ‘I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.’

“He always appeared to feel a remarkable attachment to the preachers, especially to those who visited him at his own home. Among the many who have partaken of his hospitality may be remembered Bishops Asbury, McKendree and Roberts. Those of an earlier age, when his father was living, included Robert Strawbridge, George and John Hagerty, Jesse Lee, and Captain Webb – all having preached in his house except the last named.

“Some who had but an imperfect acquaintance with him and his real circumstances have thought him wanting in liberality. This, I conceive, was not well founded. I never knew him, nor heard of an instance of him, having turned any one away without giving him something – especially when it was for the promotion of the cause of the Redeemer. Though a good liver in an humble and domestic way, he was never known to have a great deal of money over and above what was necessary to meet his liabilities – yet he was always willing to do his part in supporting the Gospel among those with whom he lived. A short time before he died, he destroyed an obligation which he held against the trustees of the meeting house amounting to \$243.60, saying it should never be demanded. Some of the last acts of his life were the having some repairs done to the meeting house and in furnishing a good copy of the Bible for the use of the same.

“As he was about to occupy the old homestead, his father – when he was about to die – enjoined upon him to take care of the preachers (and entertain) as long as he lived, as he had done before him. This for three and thirty years was strictly attended to, as all who knew him well can testify. The same injunction has been laid upon his nephew, John Low, Junior, the present occupant – who I have no doubt will carry it out to the letter.”

Henry Doll