

**THE REV. GEORGE S. BROWN: FIERY HOLINESS PREACHER,
MISSIONARY TO LIBERIA
AND RENOWNED STONEMASON**

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What are the chances that an African-American pastor would gather a white congregation in Vermont in the mid-1850s, then appoint a group of white men as Trustees of their proposed church building, and finally oversee the construction of that building? Slim to none, you may be thinking. And yet, that was exactly the case in Wolcott, Vermont, in 1855 and 1856. His name was the Rev. George S. Brown, the first African-American pastor in the former Troy Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.¹ He was born a free man on July 25, 1801, on Newport Island, Rhode Island, the son of Amos and Hannah [Smith] Brown. He reports the following about his early life in the first paragraph of his *Journal*:

I remained there [in Newport] till I was two years old, and then we moved up into Connecticut, and lived in the town of Windham, two years. From thence we moved to Ashford [the birth place of his mother] in the same State, and where I was brought up, with my father . . . My father was an elder in the Baptist Church for more than thirty years. My mother also was a pious woman.²

This is all we really know about Brown's father, other than the fact that Amos Brown died in Palmer, Massachusetts, in 1850. Hannah Smith, however, was born in Ashford, Connecticut, on February 22, 1771, the daughter of George and Delight Smith. George had been a slave prior to being released by his former owner, James Bicknell, in 1755.³ In his *Journal*, Brown states:

I was trained up after the straitest [*sic*] sect of Calvinism, till I was twenty years old. I then took my departure from my father's house, (by his consent,) and went to seek refuge for myself. But soon I became a profligate . . .

The first effectual seed which was sown in my heart was under the preaching of Rev. L[orenzo] Dow at campmeeting in Mansfield, [CT] when I was about fourteen y[ea]rs.⁴

¹ The Troy Annual Conference existed from 1832 until 2010 when the eastern New York section united with much of the remainder of New York state to form the Upper New York Conference and the Vermont churches joined with the New England Conference.

² Geo. S. Brown, *Brown's Abridged Journal, Containing a Brief Account of the Life, Trials and Travels of Geo. S. Brown, Six Years a Missionary in Liberia, West Africa: A Miracle of God's Grace* (Troy, NY: Press of Prescott & Wilson, 1849), 5. Brown kept an extensive *Journal* detailing his early life and especially his work in Liberia and his difficulties there and subsequently in the United States. Hereafter cited as *Journal*.

³ Ashford, CT, Property Record, "James Bicknell relinquishes George Smith mallotto [*sic*] man . . . setting him free," vol. J, page 18 (April 14, 1755).

⁴ *Journal*, 5.

The Rev. Dow was an eccentric Methodist Episcopal minister from New England sometimes referred to as “Crazy Dow.”

It was not until 1827, however, when Brown arrived in Kingsbury, New York that he was finally converted. George A. and Katharine M. Webster write about him in *A History of the First Methodist Church of Sanford's Ridge* [NY], as does William W. Larowe in his book, *From Circuit Rider to Episcopacy*.⁵ Larowe reports that in 1827, Brown appeared in Kingsbury, New York—with his Scotch bagpipes, oboe, clarinet and other musical instruments—having chosen this area in which to “dry out” after many years of alcohol and merriment.

He was first converted to the Baptists but after he met Methodist circuit rider William Ryder (whom he described as a “holy ghost man,”) Brown felt called by God to become an “Episcopal Methodist” and preach the gospel. He received a verbal license to exhort from the Rev. T. Fields and then a formal license to exhort from the Washington Circuit Quarterly Conference in April, 1831, and a license to preach on July 27, 1833. The Websters state that:

Word has been handed down to persons now living in the community from people who lived during his preaching that such crowds came to hear him that no building was large enough to hold them and that many hundreds were soundly converted through the exhortations of this inspired Negro.⁶

During these years Brown made his living by building stone walls, primarily on farms in the area. He gained quite a reputation as an expert stone wall builder, and many of the walls he built still stand today as a lasting monument to his skill. They were particularly known for being constructed without the use of any mortar to hold the stones in place.

At about the same time that Brown received his license to preach, he also began to experience a call to the missionary field in Liberia. The brethren of the Troy Conference advised that he receive further education before venturing off to another country, which proved somewhat difficult for Brown. Everywhere he went, he met up with people who did not know the Lord, and he could not resist the urge to preach to them—which interfered with his attending school.

His sister, Rhoda, and brother-in-law, Calvin T. Swan, offered to board him for the winter at no cost so that he could attend high school in Northfield, Massachusetts, where they lived. Though he did go to live with them in Northfield, he just could not resist preaching and never did attend school. Following that experience, the Rev. Sherman Minor and the Presiding Elder, Cyrus Prindle, made arrangements for him to travel to Vermont and study under the Rev. S. Tupper in Monkton. This experience was not as positive as it might have been.

⁵ Katharine M. and George A. Webster, *A History of the First Methodist Church of Sanford's Ridge* (Webster Mimed Service, August, 1960) pages unnumbered; William W. Larowe, *From Circuit Rider to Episcopacy* (Granville, NY: Grastorf, 1970), 33-36.

⁶ Webster, unnumbered.

Brown was forbidden to preach more than once a week on Sunday mornings but again was unable to resist the urge. He found a favorable congregation in nearby Ferrisburgh where he was apparently a better preacher than the local circuit rider who had been assigned to the area. Though Brown chooses not to name him, he does report in his *Journal* how negatively he was treated by this particular preacher who

raised a great hue and cry in that place, telling them that I was unlearned, and that my language was not grammatical, and what a reproach it was to the people to hear a colored man preach. But the worst of it all was, he said that I had robbed him of his congregation; when, in fact, he preached six miles north of me in the forenoon, and four miles in the afternoon.⁷

This same man then prevailed upon Rev. Tupper to end his tutoring sessions with Brown, and he was subsequently sent back to New York.

Finally, however, on November 19, 1834, Brown left to attend Cazenovia Seminary (the Genesee Conference Seminary) in the Central New York area.⁸ Not arriving in Cazenovia until March 15, 1835, it had taken Brown almost four months to make the journey, because he had stopped at so many places along the way to preach. That eventually led again to prohibitions being placed on his preaching so that he would concentrate on his studies. Nevertheless, Brown continued to find opportunities to preach; otherwise, he states, he would have had to leave the Seminary due to depression.⁹

Having finally completed his education at Cazenovia, Brown sailed to Liberia on October 15, 1836. Though he was originally sent to Liberia as a teacher, he could not refrain from preaching there, either, and was eventually received on trial in the Liberia Conference on January 4, 1838, and elected to deacon's and elder's orders.

Brown subsequently sailed back to America where he was ordained as a deacon on one day and as an elder the next at the annual conference held at the John Street MEC on March 25 and 26, 1838. On February 14, 1839, Brown was then received as a full member of the Liberia Annual Conference.¹⁰ It is important to note that during this period in the Methodist Episcopal Church, African Americans were only allowed to become members of an annual conference in the missionary conferences; they could not become members of conferences in the United States. Though they were allowed to be ordained as local deacons and local elders, it was membership in the annual conference that gave them full clergy rights and guaranteed them an annual appointment.

In 1839, George S. Brown married Nancy Wilson, the daughter of one of the other black preachers in Liberia. She died seven months later. In January, 1841, Brown married again to Harriet Ann Harper. They had a

⁷ *Journal*, 22-33.

⁸ This would have been a school equivalent to our high schools not a training institution for ministers.

⁹ *Journal*, 41-43.

¹⁰ *Journal*, 51, 60-61, 74.

daughter, Hannah Ann, who was born while Brown was traveling back to Africa after his trip home to America in late 1841; she died of whooping cough in May, 1843.¹¹

Wade C. Barclay, in his *History of Methodist Missions, Part One: Early American Methodism, 1769-1844, Volume I*, describes Brown's service in Africa:

During the early years much of the success of the Liberia Mission was due to the faithful labors of Negro Local Preachers . . . George S. Brown, a preacher of unusual ability, emigrated to Liberia in 1837, and shortly thereafter established a mission school in "the Pessah country" named Heddington in honor of Bishop Hedding. At the meeting of the Board on July 22, 1839, a letter from Brown was read, describing his school, and stating that the kings of several neighboring tribes were "earnestly imploring teachers and missionaries."

From Heddington, the interior station, fifty-nine conversions were reported, and missionary George S. Brown, elated, wrote to Superintendent Seys: "Come up and see the bush burn. Come up and see the desert blossom. Come up and see God convert the heathen. Do not stop to change your clothes."¹²

Unfortunately, Brown began to experience difficulties with the white superintendents in Liberia, because he refused to become involved in a political battle between superintendent, John Seys, and the Liberian Governor, Thomas Buchanan, over whether or not taxes should be charged on goods being imported from America for the colonists. Superintendent Seys wanted all of his preachers to support him on this issue. Brown, however, decided he had no desire to become embroiled in a political struggle. "I am sent here to save souls, and I therefore feel it my duty to keep entirely clear from all such difficulties."

In January, 1841, Brown was granted location status. Although he did not tell the Conference, he planned to travel to America to meet with the Missionary Board to obtain authorization to travel further into the interior to establish a new mission. John Seys traveled with Brown on the same ship.

At the end of January, 1842, Brown set sail once again for Africa with authorizations and funds from the Mission Board to go deeper into the interior of Liberia to establish a new mission. He sailed with Rev. Squire Chase, who was to replace John Seys as superintendent of the Liberia Mission, as well as Brother John Pingree from Maine, and Mrs. Ann Wilkins from New York City.

The Annual Conference commenced on March 31, 1842, and the question of Brown's re-admittance to the Conference was raised. He states that, "When I located from this conference last year, there was not one word of objection against my moral character, or any doctrine which I have at any time preached." As soon as the question of his re-admittance was raised, however, objections were made about statements he had made in America

¹¹ *Journal*, 79, 101-2, 170, 194, 221.

¹² Wade Crawford Barclay, *History of Methodist Missions Part One: Early American Methodism, 1769-1844, Vol. I* (New York, NY: Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church, 1949), 337-339.

regarding cannibalism among some of the African natives, along with the fact that he was a strong holiness preacher. While this did not seem to have been a problem in the United States, his holiness doctrines were apparently very unpopular among the white preachers in Liberia. After addressing the concerns that were raised, Brown withdrew his request for re-admittance, since his agreement in America with the Board of the Missionary Society was that he should establish the new mission whether or not he re-joined the traveling connection.

Brown spent the next few months preparing for a major foray into the interior to Goloo country—further inland than any other missionary had ever ventured. But when he went to meet with Superintendent Chase to settle his account prior to leaving for what Brown assumed might be a year or more at the new mission, the Superintendent “protested my entire account of all my expenses which I have been at, since I arrived from America,” called Brown a liar, and even referred to him as a “black scoundrel.”

At the Quarterly Conference in January of 1843, Brown was suspended from all services in the church. Superintendent Chase left suddenly in March for America and subsequently wrote Brown a letter which he did not receive until September, fully discharging him from any further service in Liberia. The Superintendent authorized Brown’s salary but nothing for the \$791 worth of expenses he had incurred.

Squire Chase had died a few weeks after his arrival in America, and John Seys was once again sent to Liberia to superintend the mission. On January 1, 1844, at the fifth Quarterly Conference held in Monrovia, George S. Brown was expelled from the Methodist Episcopal Church.¹³

In *White Americans in Black Africa*, in which she analyzed the mission and colonization movement of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Liberia, Eunjin Park states that the “Seys-Buchanan controversy eventually laid a fatal blow to the cause of native missions by provoking the withdrawal of the missionary who was more devoted to African evangelization than anyone else: George S. Brown, the champion of the Heddington mission station project.”¹⁴

On January 28, 1844, Brown sailed for America, leaving his wife behind—no doubt believing that he would settle his disagreements with the Missionary Board relatively quickly, have his credentials restored, and return to Africa and his duties there. He arrived in Baltimore on April 4 and on April 9 visited the Book Room of the Board of the Missionary Society in New York and shared with them his reason for coming to America. He submitted a bill for \$1,123 with a conditional deduction of \$423 for charges incurred in attempting to settle his claim. It would not be until September, however, that the Board of Missions would finally review his papers and issue Brown a check for \$700.

Brown then set about attempting to re-establish his membership in the

¹³ *Journal*, 218, 318, 220-21, 225, 325-343.

¹⁴ Eunjin Park, *White Americans in Black Africa* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), 142.

MEC at Glen's Falls, New York, on the Fort Ann Circuit. He was strongly opposed, however, by two gentlemen, George and James Harvey; the latter would, indeed, become a strong adversary. On December 8, Rev. Seymour Coleman "offered my name to the church as a probationer, and called on them for a vote, for or against my joining the society [at Glen's Falls]. And with the exception of one man who did not vote at all, I obtained a unanimous vote."¹⁵

Brown spent the next eight months traveling around the area, preaching his doctrine of holiness. He states in his *Journal* that he is convinced the "whole opposition which I have met within the church has been exclusively on account of my contending for vital, present, inward holiness."¹⁶

In July of 1845, Brown attended a meeting of the Fort Ann Quarterly Conference in which his credentials of ordination were to have been tested, inasmuch as he had withdrawn from the church in Liberia. When he arrived, however, Brother E. B. Hubbard, the preacher-in-charge, showed Brown a letter from the Rev. John Seys "of the blackest kind—as if he set himself to see and show how mischievously and contemptibly he could set forth my moral character." Although Brown objected, the letter was read before the whole body, having already been circulated among the preachers. The Conference refused Brown the privilege of responding to the accusations in the letter, instead appointing a committee of seven, including the above-mentioned James Harvey, to investigate the charges and report to the next Quarterly Conference. "And thus I am again suspended from preaching for three months—But I, being, or claiming to be a human being, though not white-skinned, have human feelings . . ."¹⁷

Brown met twice with the committee, and James Harvey continued to block the proceedings. The committee took no action and without explanation made no report to the next Quarterly Conference of the Fort Ann Circuit which met on October 11, 1845. Moreover, at that meeting, the Presiding Elder informed Brown that the appropriate place to present his request was to the local society.

Thus, on October 19, Brown reported that he had written his application to the society for a license to preach and was rejected after James Harvey once again demanded a reading of the Seys' letters. "But they were very frank here, just as they were at Fort Ann, last July, to repeat again and again, that there were no objections against me excepting the Seys' letter[s]." Finally, the Presiding Elder, E. B. Hubbard, "decided that, being Br Seys was a white man and wrote so pointedly, and strong, that they were bound to receive his report . . ."¹⁸

Brown was then advised it was his responsibility to prove that Seys' accusations were wrong—even though he had been given no opportunity to

¹⁵ *Journal*, 241.

¹⁶ *Journal*, 243.

¹⁷ *Journal*, 248.

¹⁸ *Journal*, 252.

do so during any of the previous proceedings. Thus, reluctant as he was to do so, Brown decided his only recourse was to bring a civil suit against John Seys. He hired the Hon. Henry B. Northup, from Sandy Hill, New York, as his counsel. This action then caused some of Brown's enemies to bring him to trial for filing a suit against Seys. At this trial, held on December 22, 1845, Brown was expelled from the M. E. Church yet again. It would seem that all of these events would have been enough to drive a lesser man to leave the MEC, but Brown states:

O but still, I call heaven to witness, that I truly love the M. E. Church with all my whole soul. I love her none the less for what a few individuals have mangled me. Moreover, she has the most righteous, consistent discipline of any church on earth and if I had been dealt with according to it, I should have now been in Africa bringing sinners to Christ.¹⁹

Brown continued to pursue his civil suit against John Seys despite numerous delays, an unsuccessful attempt on the part of the Seys lawyers to get him to drop the suit, and an attempt to change the venue for the trial from Albany to New York City. In the meantime, Brown also continued to preach wherever he could find an appointment.

Finally, Seys' witnesses from Africa arrived in July of 1848, two and a half years after Brown was expelled from the Glens Falls Society; he and his lawyer were summoned to NYC for the taking of affidavits from these witnesses. Though the witnesses were "flat against" Brown, Henry Northup proved to be extremely skillful in drawing the truth from these witnesses. After about a week, Seys' lawyers apparently realized how weak their case was and rather abruptly proposed to settle. Brown records that on August 2 at 5 PM, the following document was drawn up, and he dropped his suit:

SUPREME COURT—George S. Brown vs. John Seys
The publications complained of in the declaration in this case, are, by the undersigned defendant's attorney, hereby withdrawn, and plaintiff is paid one hundred and fifty dollars in full, and amicable settlement of this suit.
HENRY B. NORTHUP, Plaintiff's Attorney
ASA CHILDS, Attorney for the Defendant
New York August 2d, 1848.²⁰

The finalization of George S. Brown's suit essentially marks the end of his published *Journal*, the final few pages consisting only of Brown's praise of his God, who had been with him through all of these trials and brought him safely through the many storms he had had to endure. The *Journal* was published in 1849. Until recently, very little more was known about Brown's life.

The only exception were two sentences from Hamilton Child's *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Lamoille and Orleans County, VT, for 1883-84*:

The M.E. church, located at Wolcott village, was organized at an early date, and supplied for years by circuit preachers, Rev. George Brown, a colored man being the

¹⁹ *Journal*, 282.

²⁰ *Journal*, 229-282.

first resident pastor. Through his energy and perseverance money was raised to build the present church building which was erected in 1855 [actually 1856].²¹

It was not until information on the life of the Rev. Henry Boardman Taylor surfaced in the Troy Conference Archives, that something more was discovered about Brown's attempts to re-establish his formal relationship with the Troy Conference.

In a family history, published in 1892, in the section on Taylor's ministry, his relationship with George S. Brown was considered sufficiently important to have been included—most likely because Taylor was actually brought to trial for his actions. In 1850, Taylor was elected and ordained an elder in the Troy Annual Conference and appointed to the Warren, New York, Circuit. At the first Quarterly Conference of 1851, Taylor was then appointed to the Johnsburg charge.

George S. Brown, a colored man who had been a missionary to Liberia, was received by him into the church, licensed to exhort and preach, and assisted him greatly in revival work At the Conference he [Taylor] was arraigned by his Presiding Elder, S. Washburn, for mal-administration of Discipline in receiving a man who had been expelled on another charge. Fortified with a letter from E. Hedding, oldest Bishop of the church, he was, after a trial in open Conference [in 1852], acquitted by a nearly unanimous vote. He was then sent to Berkshire Circuit, with residence at Montgomery, Vt., and had to preach in Montgomery, Richford, Berkshire and Enosburg.²²

Having been acquitted of all charges, however, Taylor apparently took Brown with him to his circuit in Berkshire, Vermont, where he recommended to the Quarterly Conference that Brown's preaching credentials be restored. The original handwritten minutes of the 1853 Troy Conference read:

Wednesday Afternoon, May 18th, 1853:
 G.S. Brown's I. Frazer, P.E. of St. Albans District, presented the
 Credentials recommendation of the Quarterly Conference
 of Berkshire Circuit, asking for the restoration of the credentials of Geo. S.
 Brown an Elder in the Methodist E. Church.
 On motion vote that his credentials be restored.²³

Thus, after more than ten years of struggle and pain caused by the racism and white privilege of many in the Methodist Episcopal Church, George S. Brown was restored to his status as an elder. It is interesting that he had to move to Vermont before that could happen, however.

There is no further information regarding Brown and his ministry until 1855 when he appears in the small, rural town of Wolcott, Vermont. A number of articles in the *Vermont Christian Messenger* describe Brown's role in gathering the Wolcott church. The following appeared on April 18, 1853:

²¹ Hamilton Child, *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Lamoille and Orleans Counties, VT, for 1883-84* (Syracuse, NY: Journal Office, July, 1883), 162.

²² Henry Boardman Taylor, *Some Accounts of the Ancestors, Relatives and Family of Henry Boardman Taylor with a Memoir written by Himself and a Supplement by Rev. B. S. Taylor* (1892), 25-26.

²³ *Handwritten Minutes of the 1853 Troy Annual Conference*, 96.

Revival

HYDEPARK AND MORRISTOWN CIRCUIT—We have been favored this year with a revival of religion on some parts of the circuit, especially at Wolcott and Elmore. As the result of a series of evening meetings about eighty souls have professed justification. Forty have united with society and some have experienced the blessing of perfect love. The work is still progressing in Wolcott, under the instrumentality of Rev. Geo. S. Brown, a local (colored) preacher, whose labors in that town have been very abundant and successful for some months. At the commencement of the year, the society there was very feeble (scarcely able to support any preaching at all,) but they have experienced such a revolution in religious affairs that they propose to support a preacher alone the coming year.

All the glory be to God.

D. W. Gould
W. O. Tower

Since this notice comes from the two pastors who are serving the Morristown and Hyde Park circuit, and the Wolcott church is later described as an “appendage” of this circuit, it is quite possible that it might have been at the request/suggestion of the circuit pastors that the Presiding Elder actually sent George S. Brown to Wolcott in late 1854 or early 1855. The first few pages of the earliest “Church Record” are in Brown’s own handwriting and contain the names of a few members prior to the second entry, dated March 4, 1855. Thus, it would seem that Brown was in Wolcott prior to the revival described above and may have conducted the revival himself.

In June of 1855, a notice appeared in a number of newspapers around the country in news from Monrovia, Liberia, that “Mrs. Brown, wife of Rev. George S. Brown, died on the 18th of March. Mr. Brown is now on a visit to the United States.” This must have been a difficult time for Brown, having left his wife in Africa, with the hopes of returning there one day. By the time he had filed the civil suit against the Rev. John Seys and finally had his credentials restored in 1853, he apparently made the decision that he could never return to Africa.

A notice in the *Vermont Christian Messenger* for April 23, 1856, headed, “Morristown,” states that “. . . At Wolcott, an appendage to this circuit, the good work of last year is taking root, and the Church is growing in holiness.”²⁴ Not only was the church able to support a pastor; at a meeting held on April 29, 1856, with George S. Brown presiding, the decision was made to build a Methodist Episcopal church in Wolcott and Brown is recorded in the minutes as having appointed six white men as Trustees. It would seem that this must have been very unusual in the years before the Civil War. It says a good deal about Brown’s character and how much he was respected by these men, despite the opposition which he had met in New York or years earlier in southern Vermont.

The minutes of a meeting held on May 6 contained the following:

The Chairman now introduced the form & manner of Said Church for discussion

²⁴ “Morristown,” *Vermont Christian Messenger* (April 23, 1856), 2. Accessed online, www.genealogy.com].

of the Association, & [?], introduced to them, a one Bro. Jno. Hawse, an old Carpenter, to aid them in their plans and estimation of Said House.

And after some discussion the Estimating Committee retired with their Carpenter, and after due deliberation returned with the following report, namely:

That we need a house, 34' X 44 feet, with a basement, Story, & which will cost about \$1,200.²⁵

Brown kept a detailed day by day report of the work accomplished. The last entry is dated September 23, 1856.

Brown apparently became very ill over the winter of 1856-57, having something referred to only as “bleeding at the lungs.” His name disappears from the Wolcott class lists after 1857, and the last entries made by Brown in the record book were in late 1857. Another news article in the *Vermont Christian Messenger*, dated January 2, 1858, quotes a letter from Brown:

MORRISTOWN CIRCUIT—Rev. Geo. S. Brown, writing from Wolcott, under the date of December 28th, says, “In the course of the last three months, twenty six have experienced as we trust, a change of heart. Twenty-two have united with our church, which is in a good state of religious devotion. To Jesus be all the glory and praise evermore.”

This is the last entry in the *Vermont Christian Messenger* regarding George S. Brown.

As far as can be determined, the Wolcott, Vermont, UM Church is the only church where Brown actually served as pastor-in-charge. Though a Historic Roadside Marker outside the Sanford’s Ridge UMC in Queensbury, New York, indicates that he was the pastor there in the 1820s and 1830s, Brown himself states in his *Journal* that he was the Superintendent of the Sunday school there in 1831, and never says that he was pastor-in-charge.²⁶ The Websters also report in their history that there is no mention of this position in the church records.

In the meantime, Brown had been contacted by Abraham Wing, III, the great-grandson of the founder of Glens Falls, New York, who wanted him to build a stone wall around his daughter’s farm in Jackson, Michigan. This farm eventually evolved into the Ella Sharpe Museum. The archives in the museum contain correspondence between Abraham Wing, III, and Dwight Merriman, his son-in-law, describing Wing’s attempts to recruit Brown to travel to Michigan to construct that stone wall. The correspondence begins in early 1857 when Brown was ill in Vermont, and it is unclear if he will ever be able to do the work. Brown did recover and finally agreed to build the wall. He was a skilled negotiator, however, and insisted on \$1.50 per day plus room and board and no work on rainy days. In addition, he wanted to bring a crew of men with him to assist in the construction. Apparently, Dwight Merriman considered the cost to be too steep and therefore initially attempted to find someone else to build his stonewall. It wasn’t until 1863

²⁵ Samuel Pennock, handwritten minutes of a Trustees Meeting, Wolcott Methodist Episcopal church, May 6, 1856; on file at the Wolcott United Methodist church, Wolcott, VT.

²⁶ *Journal*, 23.

that Merriman finally agreed to Brown's terms and finalized his agreement with him. An August 13, 1872, article in the *Jackson [MI] Citizen Patriot* states that:

Brown's decision to come west was contingent on an agreement that one-way transportation to Michigan must be provided, wages would be a "whopping" \$1.50 a day, his board was free and there would be no work on rainy days.

With him came a Mr. Bacon, a Mr. Dickenson, Herman Peary, Isaac Mosher, and some of their families who traveled in an emigrant train from Fort Edward [NY] to Schenectady to Toledo to Jackson at a total cost of \$27 each. Their wages were \$18 a month and living quarters.

The stone wall took two years to finish and was a half mile long. In 1869, the Michigan State Agricultural Society recognized the wall for its artistic and engineering design with a medal given to the Merrimans. In 1967, a little more than 100 years after the wall was completed, it was designated a historic site, and a plaque was placed on the wall by the Ella Sharp Museum. Nowhere in all of these recognitions, however, is George S. Brown ever officially recognized for his work; all the credit is given to the Merrimans. Had it not been for the fact that the farm eventually became a museum and the archives maintained all the correspondence between Merriman and Wing, it is likely nothing would have been known about Brown's involvement in constructing the wall.

In 1866, after the wall was completed, Brown returned to New York and became involved once again in the Sanford's Ridge MEC, where he is listed for a number of years as a local preacher for the church.²⁷ He is similarly listed for a number of years in the *Troy Conference Journal* as a local preacher.

In 1869, a book of hymns entitled, *The REVIVALIST: A Collection of Choice Revival Hymns and Tunes, Original and Selected*, was published by Joseph Hillman. This book included a hymn by Brown, titled, "Hallelujah to Jesus." This hymn sprang from a dream which Brown had in which he heard a group of heavenly beings singing. He states in his *Journal* that he awoke and wrote down all that he could remember of the words. Interestingly, this dream occurred on the 16th of September, 1834, right after he returned home from his unfortunate experience in Vermont during the previous summer.

George S. Brown died on April 10, 1886, in Glens Falls, New York, and is buried in the Quaker Cemetery in Queensbury, New York. In 2007, the former Troy Conference Historical Society placed a clergy grave marker on his grave—the first African-American pastor in the conference to receive such a marker. The 2008 Troy Annual Conference approved a resolution to designate the Wolcott, Vermont, UMC as an official Historic Site of The United Methodist Church. In 2010, a Vermont Historic Roadside Marker was approved for the church, which was subsequently listed on the Vermont African American Heritage Trail.

²⁷ This does not mean that he served the church as their pastor. Many churches had local preachers connected with them who were members of the church.

Thus ends the saga of the Rev. George S. Brown—expert stonemason, missionary to Liberia, and fiery holiness preacher. He was a man of unusual abilities and faith on many levels. There are many lasting memorials to this “giant” of a man, who lived out his belief in his God as courageously and faithfully as possible—sometimes against almost impossible odds. Besides the many stone walls that are still in existence more than 150 years later, his legacy includes his published *Journal*; his hymn; the Historic Roadside Marker; and most importantly, the church building itself, constructed under his supervision by a congregation which he had gathered and grown: leaving behind not an African-American congregation, but a white congregation—a miracle in itself in 1855-56.

Moreover, as far as has been able to be determined to date, this is the only white United Methodist church in the United States that was actually gathered by and built by an African American.

The church is currently undergoing a major renovation due to the drainage of water into the foundation caused by the stone ledge against which the church was constructed. The small but faithful congregation is determined, however, to raise the funds needed to preserve this memorial to the amazing man who founded the congregation and oversaw the construction of the building at a time when many African Americans were being sent to Africa to live.

In the meantime, we sing with the writer of the hymn, “Hallelujah to Jesus, amen and amen, we will praise him forever again and again.”