Elijah Holmes Pilcher—Methodist Preacher Extraordinary

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WITH a horse, a few books in his saddlebags, and only 12½ cents in his pocket, a young Methodist circuit rider reached Detroit on Saturday evening, October 2, 1830, on his way to the Ann Arbor Circuit. This was Elijah Holmes Pilcher, who was beginning a long and notable career in Michigan Methodism.

Pilcher, sent up by the Ohio Conference to this frontier circuit as junior preacher, was only 20 years old. The senior preacher, Henry Colclazer, was but one year his senior. Pilcher’s assets were of the intangible kind, including (as his son later wrote), “an inexhaustible fund of energy, a well disciplined mind, a vigorous and robust body, and an intense desire to save the souls of man.”

The circuit rider’s father, Stephen Pilcher, was a native of Virginia, born in 1772 at Dumfries, Prince William County. As Stephen Pilcher reached maturity he took seriously the democratic ideals of the Declaration of Independence, and wondered why freedom was for the white man alone. He freed his slaves and he undertook to persuade his friends and relatives to adopt his views concerning slavery. Finally life in a slave-holding area became odious to him, and in 1805 he migrated to Ohio with six children and his second wife, Eleanor Silby.

Force of character made Stephen Pilcher a leader in the new region. He was for years a justice of the peace. He was a stonemason and proud that he was superintendent of construction for the foundations of the first buildings of Ohio University. The Pilchers were Methodists and their home became a stopping place for itinerant ministers. On one occasion Bishop Asbury was entertained in their home. For years Stephen Pilcher was a class leader and a steward. Preaching services and prayer meetings were frequently held in his house, and the first church in the area was built on his farm. All of his children became active Christians and two sons entered the Methodist ministry.


2 Pilcher, James, op. cit., 9-11.
Elijah H. Pilcher was born near Athens, Ohio, June 2, 1810. He was brought up on a pioneer farm. As soon as he was able to swing an axe, he helped with clearing the land—felling giant trees, grubbing bushes, splitting rails, and heaping and burning brush. As a lad he wore homemade clothing. He pulled and dressed the flax which his mother or sisters spun into thread, and he himself wove it into cloth for shirts and trousers.

Elijah was converted at a camp meeting when only ten years old. Influenced by the religious atmosphere of his boyhood home and by the Methodist circuit riders whom his parents welcomed, he became convinced that he was duty bound to become a preacher of the gospel. He had received an elementary education. His older brother, Henry, had gone to college, and Henry persuaded their father to let Elijah go, too. In the fall of 1826 this sturdy farm lad entered Ohio University at Athens, where he boarded with a family that had formerly lived in his own neighborhood. In college Elijah associated with Edward R. Ames (later bishop) and others who became leaders in Methodism. After two years lack of money forced Elijah to leave college. He then taught school for a year in West Virginia. He enforced discipline in the school room and forbade profanity and rudeness. At the end of the year he tore himself away "in obedience to the voice of God, directing him to go forth and preach the Gospel, and there was great wailing and weeping in the school and in the entire village where he was long held in grateful remembrance."

At the age of 19 Elijah Pilcher was licensed to preach and was recommended for admission on trial into the Ohio Annual Conference. He was sent down to the Nicholas Circuit in what is now West Virginia. Within the bounds of this circuit were some of the highest peaks in the Alleghenies, a fact which caused Bishop McKendree to remark whimsically, "The man that goes there will stand the highest of any man in the Conference." After one year of arduous labor in which he saw 80 souls converted and during which he received a meager salary of $67, Pilcher went to Michigan.

The Ann Arbor Circuit in the fall of 1830 "included the country from a point six miles west of Detroit to five miles west of Ann Arbor." Settlers were then pouring into Michigan and constantly pushing farther into the wilderness. Hearing that the village of Jacksonburg had been established 40 miles west of Ann Arbor, the preachers determined to hold services there. In January 1831, Pilcher set out for the new settlement. There were but three or four houses on the way, and no road to guide him. "The frosty

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3 Ibid., 18.  
4 Daniels, W. H.: The Illustrated History of Methodism, 687.  
5 Memoir of Elijah H. Pilcher.  
6 Pilcher, James E., op. cit., 35.  
7 Hollingshead, op. cit.
weather...numbed his fingers. But through the blowing snow, over the creaking ice and under the frost-covered trees, he fought his course," and arrived at his destination. On the 27th of January he inaugurated services in Jackson, preaching in the barroom of a log tavern. On his way back to Ann Arbor, Pilcher stopped at a new cabin, in what is now Grass Lake, and held services. Years later two women, conspicuous workers in the church, informed him that they were young girls at that service and that they dated their Christian life from his preaching on that day. Pilcher says that Jacksonburg was a wild and rough town; the inhabitants were very poor, and most of them were shaking from fever and ague. Before the year was out Pilcher and Colclazier had 26 appointments on their frontier circuit, embracing the settlements on either side of the territorial road from Dearbornville to Jacksonburg, and they made their rounds every four weeks. They held a successful camp meeting. Progress was so marked that the next year the circuit was divided.

In 1831 Pilcher was appointed to the Tecumseh Circuit, with Ezekiel S. Gavit as junior preacher. This circuit, as arranged by Pilcher, covered six counties—Lenawee, Washtenaw, Jackson, Calhoun, Branch, and Hillsdale—and was nearly 400 miles in length. There were 27 preaching points to be covered every four weeks. Each preaching place had a service by a circuit minister every two weeks. Between the circuit preachers' visits local preachers and class leaders assisted with the work.

Elijah Pilcher, in his "History of Protestantism in Michigan," has told part of the dramatic story of his labors and experiences as he arranged the bounds and planned the work of this new circuit. Arriving in Ann Arbor on September 21, he took the familiar trail to Jackson. Then he rode west 30 miles to Marshall, a new settlement previously unreached by the circuit riders, preaching in a cabin en route. After speaking twice in Marshall on Sunday, he hired a man on Monday to guide him through the woods to Coldwater, another new place. Taking out his clothes and books, he filled his saddlebags with oats for the horses, and bread and raw pork for himself and his companion. He writes:

"We supplied ourselves with an axe, a gun, a pocket compass and a map, and so we marked the trees on the south side, so that we could follow the same way back. When we came to the St. Joseph River we found it very high, and did not like to venture in, so we cut a tree, which reached nearly across, and one went over on that and the other drove the horses through and then followed on the tree. Thus we continued until night overtook us. Wet and tired, we kindled a fire, made a hut of brush, roasted our meat, and ate supper and went to

8 Ibid.
9 Pilcher, op. cit., 54.
bed, after family prayer. My great coat made my bed, my saddle and saddlebags my pillow. Slept some. The wolves howled most hideously most of the night.”

On Tuesday they resumed their journey, but seemed to make no progress. Pilcher soon concluded that they would be unable to find their way through the uncharted wilderness in time for him to keep his Sunday preaching appointments at Tecumseh and Clinton. Therefore, they gave up and returned to Marshall that day. Then, after some trying and anxious experiences in crossing rivers and marshes, he made it back to Ann Arbor and thence to Tecumseh.

The next week Pilcher rode from Tecumseh westward to Coldwater, where there were only two cabins. On Friday he started very early, blazing a trail through the woods to the north. A few miles beyond the St. Joseph River he came to his old blazes. Thus he reached Marshall about sundown and met his colleague, Gavit. The next day Pilcher returned to Coldwater, Gavit going halfway with him. They worked hard with their axes to blaze the trail adequately, and then after prayer parted “in the wild woods.” Pilcher writes graphically: “Thus I have spent four days, carrying an axe and blazing the trees to make a way to get around our Circuit. My right shoulder is so sore and lame that I can scarcely lift my hand to my head. But I am resolved to persevere.” Such was the indomitable spirit of the early circuit riders!

Pilcher often rode his circuit when his feet and legs were wet, and his legs would become so chafed that it was necessary to wind a silk handkerchief around them so that he could go on in some degree of comfort. On the circuit there were two long stretches without any houses. On the long trip from Coldwater to Adrian the itinerants had to stop overnight in a tavern, probably Moscow, where they had to pay for accommodations, something they could ill afford to do. Ordinarily they slept every night in a different cabin and partook of the humble fare offered. The settlers shared gladly what they had for they felt honored to entertain the circuit riders, and were glad to hear the news they brought from other places.

The system of boarding around, ordinarily enjoyable, had its drawbacks on occasion. Pilcher says that the year before, a man at one of his appointments on the River Rouge insisted that he stay overnight with him. With some reluctance Pilcher agreed. They traveled through thick forest to the man’s one-room log cabin. Pilcher wrote of it:

“This one room had two beds in it, without curtains around either of them. The mansion was surrounded by a rail fence, in such a condition that it allowed the pigs to have free access to the yard, and they

\[12\] Ibid., 125.
also had free access to the parlor. Besides them there were two or three dogs, which were commoners in the house, interspersed with some chickens and children. As might be expected there was no carpet on the floor, and the floor was very much as the dirt of the field. All the household linen and bedding might have been washed some time, but if so, it was so long ago that they had forgotten how it seemed."

As night drew on, the young minister was anxious to know where he was to sleep. When the time came the problem was solved by the man of the house pointing to one of the two beds, saying, "When you wish to retire, you will occupy that bed," and added that two or three of the little boys would have to sleep with him. "His wife was very kind, but still I found no occasion to visit them again. These are only some of the pleasures that go to make up the wool of an itinerant Methodist preacher's life, and tend to give spice and romance to it."

It is interesting to note that game was plentiful on the Tecumseh Circuit, and the young circuit rider "often wished for a gun, but could not have one," for he explains, "I would have to carry it on the Sabbath as well as other days, because there was no returning on my route." It was against his religious principles to carry a gun on the Sabbath.

Looking back over his experiences on the Tecumseh Circuit long afterward, Pilcher wrote:

"The people of this day can form no idea of the labor, inconvenience and suffering incident to traveling a circuit here in 1831-1832. What was the pecuniary compensation? One hundred dollars a year and board around. We had to share with the people in the coarseness and scantiness of their fare, and sleep in their cabins. It is difficult for even myself to realize the change which has come over the face of the country."

From 1832 to 1834 Pilcher served the Monroe Circuit which extended from Trenton to Perrysburg, Ohio, and included a mission for the Wyandotte Indians west of Flat Rock. Pilcher tells of visiting the Indian school and sleeping one night on a bench. The next day he made pastoral calls. At an Indian hut he asked for dinner and was given some hominy from a kettle over the fire, and some maple sugar. In 1834-1835 he served the Farmington Circuit, and the Calhoun Mission Circuit the next year. On this frontier circuit his health broke down. At the first session of the Michigan Annual Conference at Mansfield, Ohio, in September 1836, in answer to question 8, "Who are the superannuated or wornout preachers?" the name of Elijah H. Pilcher was given, along with Elias Pattee.

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16 Ibid., 85.
17 Ibid., 87.
15 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 35.
Hoping to recover his health, Pilcher went to southern Ohio where he taught school for five months with outstanding success.

In 1837 the Conference treated Pilcher kindly and sent him to Ann Arbor, one of the three station appointments in Michigan. Pilcher labored with his characteristic zeal and had a notable revival. Among the converts who joined the church was a boy of fourteen, Judson D. Collins. Collins went on to become a class leader, Sabbath school superintendent, and a local preacher. In 1836 Pilcher offered to go as a missionary to China, but the Missionary Society turned him down. Now his missionary enthusiasm touched young Collins. Collins graduated in the first class of the University of Michigan in 1845, deeply imbued with a desire to enter missionary work in China. He was one of the two men to go out in Methodism’s first mission to China in 1847. Unfortunately his health broke and he soon had to return home. He died in 1852 at the age of 29, a martyr to the missionary cause. Elijah Pilcher was Collins’ spiritual father. Ere Pilcher’s fruitful career was over, a host of clergymen, college presidents, and missionaries were glad to acknowledge that Pilcher was their spiritual father.

From 1838 to 1842 Pilcher served as presiding elder of the new Marshall District. It was a frontier district on the west side of the Conference, covering Calhoun, Branch, Hillsdale, Eaton, Ingham, Barry, Kent, Ionia, Clinton, and Shiawassee Counties and a part of Jackson County. At first Pilcher had to travel all the way from the territorial road north to the Grand River with no Methodist work between, to reach the Lyons Circuit and the Grand Rapids Mission. He blazed trails between the Grand River and the territorial road that stimulated settlement. The people began to move into this in-between area and the Eaton Mission was established in 1840. The presiding elder’s lonesome rides through the woods became shorter as his term went on.

After 1842 Pilcher served in repeated presiding elder assignments, as well as in stations, and he became more and more a leader in Michigan Methodism. With zeal, courage, and a passion for souls, he had proved himself as a preacher on frontier circuits. When the fearful cholera epidemic came in the summer of 1832 and nearly depopulated the village of Marshall, Elijah Pilcher never stopped his preaching rounds. His religious experience was not as emotional as that of many of the early Methodists, but the apostolic spirit burned within him and revivals often sprang up in his wake. He brought into the Church about 3,000 persons in a day when church and population figures were much smaller than today. He founded at least 14 churches and probably more; according to his son the list includes Jackson, Grass Lake, Marshall, Coldwater, Manchester,

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Dexter, Chelsea, Saline, Leslie, Hastings, Sharon and three churches in Detroit. Pilcher was a faithful pastor; he made it a point to visit every parishioner at frequent intervals. The people welcomed him, and he was popular with the children.

Pilcher had the Methodist passion for righteousness. He labored for temperance. His first sermon in Jackson was preached in a barroom with the bottles in plain view. He records with glee that after a time he had the pleasure of seeing "the bottles removed, and of delivering a temperance lecture in the same room, standing behind the bar." In the great struggle over the slavery question, Elijah Pilcher, like his father before him, stood on the side of humanity and freedom. His views were positive and his logic was convincing. In one meeting a pro-slavery advocate, in a fury over his inability to cope with Pilcher polemically, rushed upon him with the intention of substituting violent action for words in the argument. But his companions intervened and restrained him. Pilcher, smiling and undisturbed, tranquilly resumed his remarks.

Elijah Pilcher is justly famous in Michigan Methodism as one of the three founders of Albion College. In 1833 Henry Colclazer, Benjamin Packard, and Pilcher agreed that there ought to be an academy of higher learning in Michigan under the patronage of the church. The Ohio Conference in 1834 acted favorably on their proposal and appointed a committee. On March 23, 1835, the Legislative Council of the Territory granted a charter to "Spring Arbor Seminary." This community had promised support, but it seemed impossible to get the project started. With the passage of time there were changes in the population, and a location on the territorial road became more desirable.

In 1838 an offer from Albion was accepted. In 1839 the charter was amended and the school was named "The Wesleyan Seminary at Albion." At the moment Pilcher was located nearby at Marshall, and he devoted much time and labor to getting the school under way. For some years he was president of the Board of Trustees. On July 6, 1841, he assisted in laying the cornerstone of the main building. The first edifice was completed and opened for students in November 1843. The first spring exhibition came in 1844. Pilcher traveled all the way from Detroit to attend it, and rejoiced over the realization of his dreams.

The seminary was co-educational from the beginning. As public schools developed in Michigan, with no college for the higher edu-

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21 Hollingshead, op. cit.
23 Pilcher, James E., op. cit., 89.
25 Pilcher, James E., op. cit., 111.
26 Ibid., 111. Gildart, op. cit., 28, cites the "Western Statesman" published at Marshall, June 24, 1841, to the effect that the cornerstone would be laid on July 6. Two other authorities give the date as June, 1841, and one says August, 1841.
tion of women, the scope of the new school enlarged. For a time it had an unwieldy name, "The Wesleyan Seminary at Albion and Albion Female Collegiate Institute." Pilcher soon saw that there was room for a strong Methodist educational institution of college rank in Michigan. In 1861 the name of the school was changed to Albion College. Pilcher, employing his legal knowledge, drafted the charter which provided that Albion's curriculum should always be equal to that of the State University. In appraising Pilcher's contribution, his biographer says, "It is believed that he was the pioneer in recognizing the equality of the sexes in higher education." This apparently is true in the Michigan scene.

Throughout his life, Elijah Pilcher remained close to and was an enthusiastic supporter of Albion College. In 1875 he delivered the annual address before the literary societies, using as his theme, "Educating Forces." He held his audience spellbound. With great satisfaction he watched the college expand under the presidency of his brother-in-law, Lewis R. Fiske, beginning in 1877. In old age when confined to his bed, Pilcher earned some money by writing which he gave to Albion College as the last installment of a subscription he had made to its endowment fund.

Pilcher himself had an insatiable hunger for knowledge. As a circuit rider he carried books in his saddlebags to the cabins where he was to spend the night. After salutations and suitable religious conversation, he would turn to his books. His son says:

"The children might play about him and the mother might scold them or talk to him, but he was oblivious of all disturbance. The dogs might fight and the pigs might run amuck through the cabin, but he maintained an unruffled imperturbability. Or as he jogged along the lonely trails on his gentle roadster, he could command the best of companionship . . . face to face with the Fathers of the Church. Horace would sing his odes, Shakespeare would recite his plays." 

In one year on the Monroe Circuit, Pilcher read, in addition to the whole Bible and the Christian Advocates, Wesley's Works in seven volumes; Bang's History of Missions; Bang's Methodist Episcopacy; Heckwaelder's Narrative; Watson's Conversations; a part of Watson's Dictionary; and Maury's Eloquence three times. He read Latin and Greek fluently, mastering equally the Vulgate and the Septuagint. He acquired a fair knowledge of Hebrew and attained considerable fluency in German, preaching in the language on occasion to German-speaking people.

When first appointed presiding elder, Pilcher concluded that a knowledge of the law would be helpful to him. He, therefore, began to read law in the office of an attorney in Marshall, carried

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27 Pilcher, James, op. cit., 112.  
28 Ibid., 113.  
29 Ibid.  
30 Ibid., 85-96.
books on the subject with him on his rounds, and studied them on horseback and at every available opportunity. He was admitted to the bar in 1846. Later Pilcher decided that he would be a more helpful pastor if he had a knowledge of medicine. Therefore, in 1847 he began to read medicine in the office of Dr. Backus of Jackson. Stationed at Ann Arbor ten years later, he decided "to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the medical department of the University which he had himself been prominent in establishing, and matriculated as a student." 31 For two years he attended lectures, worked in chemistry, "dissected the human subject," wrote and defended a thesis on "Neuralgia," and passed the same examination as the rest of his class. Pilcher's medical thesis runs to 96 pages, about 10,000 words. It lacks the footnotes of a modern scholarly paper, and seems to use the deductive method of Aristotle more than the inductive, scientific method. The thesis says that neuralgia "is a term of rather recent origin":

"Is this really a modern disease or is it one that has always existed ... I think it is really a recent disease, as the indulgencies and luxuries of modern times lay the great foundation for it, as will appear more fully..." 32

In 1859 Pilcher received his medical degree. Previously, studying alone he had completed his original college course. He was awarded an M.A. degree in 1848 and his S.T.D. degree in 1865. Cornell College in Iowa conferred on him an LL.D. degree in 1866.33 Pilcher was an enthusiastic promoter of education. He helped to establish the University of Michigan. He served actively for six years, 1845 to 1851, as a regent of the institution. Experience and observation across the peninsula convinced him that the system of branches was unsound strategy for the University, sapping its worth and vitality. At his first regents' meeting he horrified his associates by moving the discontinuance of appropriations for the support of the branch schools. After presenting a lucid argument in favor of his position, his motion prevailed. He promoted the expansion of the University with the establishment of a medical department. The medical school graduated its first class in 1850. Pilcher was present and signed the first diplomas.34

Pilcher had a keen interest in agriculture. In 1849 he bought a small farm adjoining the town of Jackson with the thought of establishing an agricultural college and a model farm. In 1850 while the editor of the Kalamazoo Gazette was serving in the state constitutional convention, Pilcher filled in as guest editor. He wrote

31 Hollingshead, op. cit.
32 "Neuralgia" by Elijah H. Pilcher, A.M., in Michigan Historical Collections, University of Michigan.
33 Hollingshead, op. cit.
34 Pilcher, James, op. cit., 106-7.
a series of strong editorials calling “attention to the advantage of agricultural education.” The papers were widely circulated in the convention, and Pilcher’s suggestions were adopted.35 Pilcher provided the spark that led to the establishment of Michigan Agricultural College in 1855 (now Michigan State University), the first such college in the land. Governor John Barry in 1856 said: “Mr. Pilcher has done more for education in this State than any other twenty men in it.” 36

Elijah Pilcher received many honors during his career. The Michigan Conference in 1852 elected him one of the trustees of Northwestern University.37 He was Secretary of the Michigan and Detroit Conferences for nine years.38 Five times he was a delegate to the General Conference—1840, 1848, 1852, 1856, and 1864. He was president of the Conference Missionary Society and served on innumerable committees. He was a member of the Book Committee of the Western Book Concern from 1848 to 1852, and again in the 1860’s. In 1864 he secured action establishing a branch of the Methodist Book Concern in Detroit.39

On June 4, 1835, Elijah Pilcher married Caroline Packard, daughter of Benjamin Packard of Ann Arbor and Spring Arbor. She died five years later, leaving an infant son, Jason Henry, later a prominent businessman of Jackson. In 1842 Pilcher married Phebe Fiske of Coldwater. They had three sons and one daughter who followed, in their vocations, the medical or religious interests of their father. Ellen became matron of the Methodist Episcopal Hospital in Brooklyn, New York. Lewis became a surgeon of international reputation in Brooklyn, and editor-in-chief of the Annals of Surgery. William Leander Pilcher joined the Detroit Conference and became a missionary to China (where his father had once hoped to go) and served as president of Peking University. The youngest son, James Elijah Pilcher, was a captain in the medical department of the U. S. Army and wrote the biography of his father, “Life and Labors of Elijah H. Pilcher.” The mother of these children died in Romeo, Michigan, in August 1866. Elijah Pilcher in 1871 married for the third time, Miss Katherine Ransom.40

Pilcher in his later career was repeatedly a presiding elder, serving on the following districts: Detroit, 1842-1844; Adrian, 1853-1857; Port Huron, 1859-1860; Ann Arbor, 1860-1864; Detroit 1872-1876 (“a very successful term” according to the writer of his Memoir). He was appointed as pastor of several important churches in the state—Adrian, 1844-1846; Jackson, 1846-1848 (he served also as Agent of Albion Seminary while at Jackson); Battle Creek, 1848-

35 Ibid., 109
36 Ibid., 109
37 Ibid., 110
38 Memoir, Detroit Conference Minutes, 1887.
39 Hollingshead, op. cit.
40 Pilcher, James E., op. cit., 129-134.
1849; Kalamazoo 1849-1851; First Church, Detroit, 1851-1853; Ann Arbor, 1857-1859. For a time during the Civil War he served as “Christian Commission Agent.” During his pastorate at Romeo, 1864-1867, he led in setting up the public school system. In 1867 Pilcher was appointed again to Tecumseh. At the age of 57 he had a beautiful, old-fashioned handwriting; his records at Tecumseh are interesting to study.

In 1868 Pilcher made a trip to the Holy Land, in the company of his beloved friend, W. X. Ninde (later bishop). They made an extended trip through western and southern Europe, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, and the Holy Land. In those days few people went abroad, and fewer still traveled to the Holy Land. Pilcher wrote an extensive series of articles on his travels, 54 of them being published in the Detroit Tribune and others in the church papers.

Abel Stevens, the Methodist historian, wrote in 1852, “Elijah H. Pilcher of Michigan presents a rosy, healthy countenance, with full, kind features, fine expressive eyes, iron-gray hair, good cranio logical indications, and a finely built and rounded form; he is reputed one of the strongest men of the Northwest.” J. V. Watson of the Michigan Conference, editor of the Northwestern Christian Advocate, wrote of Pilcher,

“His whole being illustrates the law of perfect symmetry of development. Physically, intellectually, and morally the balance of power seems perfectly preserved. He has a positive characteristic in a minute knowledge of our church law and in a prompt readiness of parliamentary accuracy, either on the floor of an Annual or General Conference; he has few equals and fewer superiors. His brethren always rely upon him in matters of Conference business, and he will tell you the state of a question at any time with as much accuracy as a chronometer points you to the time of day.”

Pilcher’s contemporaries were well aware of his sterling character, proved ability, and outstanding achievements.

Elijah Pilcher possessed boundless energy and zest for life. He had many interests. Michigan Methodists had talked of establishing a separate Christian Advocate as early as 1850. Oren Whitmore, presiding elder of the Adrian District, in 1873 began the publication of a small district monthly paper. In January, 1874, this became The Michigan Christian Advocate. In December 1874, Whitmore, Pilcher, and other conference leaders organized a joint stock company to publish the Advocate. This paper in all the years since has meant much to Michigan Methodism. Pilcher served for a short time as president of the stock company.
The two annual conferences in Michigan in 1875 appointed committees to act jointly in locating suitable grounds for an annual state camp meeting. Pilcher was one of the leading founders of Bay View, suggesting the name, drafting the articles of incorporation, locating the site of the first building, and serving as its first president. Pilcher preached the first sermon at Bay View in 1876.\(^4^7\) He was one of the incorporators of the Detroit Annual Conference.\(^4^8\)

One of Pilcher's greatest contributions to Michigan Methodism came in 1878, when he published his 464-page history entitled, *Protestantism in Michigan: Being a Special History of the Methodist Episcopal Church.* To this date, this is the only considerable history of Michigan Methodism that has been brought out. Its style is rambling and discursive, but even so it is a storehouse of interesting and valuable information, much of which would have been lost had Pilcher not compiled the volume. He deserves praise for largely preserving the early heritage of Michigan Methodism.

In his lifetime Elijah Pilcher wrote many articles for the press. He drafted a series of articles on slavery and prohibition which were influential in the formation of public opinion. In the spring of 1843 two anonymous tracts appeared in Detroit attacking the Methodists and the legitimacy of Methodist ordination. Pilcher took up the cudgels for his church. His answer, published in a single pamphlet, was so convincing that the two tracts soon disappeared. Pilcher prepared a series of autobiographical sketches which appeared in the *Canada Christian Advocate* in 1867.\(^4^9\) In his last years he worked on an extensive history of the church in Detroit, but it was never published. His children urged him to bring out his autobiography, and he wrote nearly 600 pages on letter paper. His son said of the autobiography, "It will never be published, but ... the unreserved picture it embodies of the life of the grand old man who wrote it, will ever be treasured as a priceless legacy to those who loved him so dearly."\(^5^0\)

In 1876-1877, when Elijah Pilcher was serving the Jefferson Avenue Church in Detroit, a Macedonian call came to him from across the border. He became concerned about the small membership of the Methodist Church in Canada. In the early years of the nineteenth century, Methodism seemed to be a powerful, expanding force in Canada as it was in the United States. Now, many quarrels and reorganizations later, Canadian Methodism seemed to be static or dormant. Pilcher was urged to lend the weight of his zeal and wisdom to the church in Canada. He heeded the call without counting the cost. He withdrew from the Detroit Conference, since no other way was open to him. In the Conference Min-

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 437f; Ibid., 107-110.  
\(^{48}\) Detroit Annual Conference Minutes, 1877; Hollingshead, op. cit.  
\(^{49}\) Pilcher, James, op. cit., 121, 124.  
\(^{50}\) Ibid., 127-129.
utes of 1877, we read, "Question 12. Have any withdrawn? Answer. —Elijah Holmes Pilcher, M.D., D.D., who has given his life to pastoral labor in Michigan, and who withdrew to enter the ministry of the M. E. Church in Canada, and to aid our brethren there." On September 6 it was announced that "Elijah H. Pilcher, who had already begun work in the M. E. Church in Canada, had withdrawn from our church. The request for acquiescence in the withdrawal was granted, and the Secretary was instructed . . . to expressly record the fact that Elijah H. Pilcher is in good standing among us, and withdraws solely to aid a sister church in her work. After a statement to this effect by Dr. Pilcher, J. M. Fuller moved that a committee of three be appointed to frame resolutions expressive of the regard in which Dr. Pilcher is held among us. The motion prevailed by a unanimous vote."

In Canada Pilcher assumed large responsibilities, serving at first in St. Thomas. Soon he became presiding elder of the Hamilton District. It was a magnificent venture for a man past 67, who had suffered the hardships of the frontier, and who labored incessantly in the ministry for half a century! He charged into his new responsibilities with his old verve. But the task became too great, and on April 6, 1882, he was stricken with paralysis.51

Pilcher was taken to the home of his son, Lewis, the doctor in Brooklyn, New York. He had always been a man of tireless industry. Now when his right hand had lost its cunning, at the age of seventy-two, he patiently undertook the task of learning to write with his left hand, and succeeded so well that he wrote "with great beauty and correctness." He recovered sufficiently to make a trip to Michigan in 1885 to visit his friends and attend the Annual Conference, where he was cordially readmitted into membership.

When near the end of his life, Pilcher had his grandchildren brought to his bedside and blessed them as did the patriarchs of old. Then bidding his family an affectionate adieu, he peacefully passed on to the higher life on April 7, 1887. He was buried in Greenwood Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York. Upon the tombstone was inscribed the following legend:

Born at Athens, O., June 2, 1810
Died in Brooklyn, N. Y., April 7, 1887.

Pilcher's son adds in his "Prefatory Note":

"Here was laid to rest the mortal frame which had enshrined a soul beloved and honored by all who, during life, had been brought within its strong and gentle influence. A pioneer of undaunted courage, a preacher of the apostolic type, a thinker of wisdom and sagacity, and

52 Memoir, Detroit Conference Minutes, 1887.
a worker regardless of toil or fatigue, his existence had been one of unremitting service for the Master. During his long life he had been so intimately associated with the beginning and formation of a State and the inception and growth of Christian work there that his career had become inextricably interwoven with its history."

Perhaps the versatility of Elijah H. Pilcher and his accomplishments have seldom been equalled or surpassed by any other church leader. His labors were successful whether on circuits, in large churches, or on districts. His administrative ability was outstanding. His scholarly attainments and his proficiency in three professions were remarkable. His writings were voluminous and influential, and they merit praise. His service to the various communities in which he lived and worked and indeed his service to the whole State of Michigan was statesmanlike and distinguished to a marked degree. He founded and promoted institutions which continue to serve the common good to this day. Throughout his life he had an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, and he was a zealous and indefatigable worker. He was a preacher, church statesman, lawyer, doctor, and church historian—a minister of Jesus Christ who gave his utmost to the last. Truly "he being dead, yet speaketh."

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52 Pilcher, James, op. cit., preface.