Report of the
Association of Methodist Historical Societies
To the General Conference of 1964

Preliminary Statement

The 1960 General Conference adopted a resolution directing the Association of Methodist Historical Societies "to formulate plans for the appropriate recognition and celebration in 1966 of the Bicentenary of American Methodism and to report said plans in detail to the 1964 General Conference for the consideration and action of that body." (1960 General Conference Journal, p. 1310)

The Association of Methodist Historical Societies notes at the outset that American Methodism was inspired and benefited in 1866 by the Centennial Celebration of its beginning. One hundred years ago the program called for special religious services in the churches and liberal thank offerings. There were centenary services in the churches on the first Sunday of January, 1866, a memorial sermon in each annual conference at its 1866 session, and special centennial services in all churches and Sunday schools throughout the month of October, 1866. Offerings were taken for both connectional and local or annual conference causes, the grand total amounting to $8,700,000. Abel Stevens, the well-known Methodist historian of the time, wrote a book entitled, The Centenary of American Methodism. The volume was extensively circulated during the Centennial Celebration.

As is generally known, the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized at the "Christmas Conference" in Baltimore in 1784. What Methodism will celebrate in 1966 is the Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Organization of the First Methodist Societies in America.

The Association of Methodist Historical Societies notes that while historians agree on the date John and Charles Wesley began their ministry in Georgia (1736), the date of the arrival of the first preachers who came over under the direction of John Wesley (1769), the date of the first conference held by the preachers (1773), the date of the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church (1784), et cetera, they do not agree on the place nor the time when the first Methodist society was established in this country.

The new three-volume History of American Methodism, authorized by the 1956 General Conference, and published in April, 1964, says:
Methodism arose in America in the 1760's under the leadership of unofficial lay preachers. The documents bearing witness to their work are less precise than would have been the case with officially delegated missionaries. There are several claims to priority. In determining the exact date of the first society in America the sources will not allow us to decide the issue. (P. 74)

The Discipline in 1787 carried a historical statement. It said in substance what appears in a part of the history printed in the 1960 Discipline:

From England Methodism spread to Ireland and then to America. In 1766 Philip Embury, a lay preacher from Ireland, began to preach in the city of New York. At about the same time Robert Strawbridge, another lay preacher from Ireland, settled in Frederick County, Maryland, and began to work there. (P. 4)

In the quadrennium beginning in 1912, the General Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church appointed members to a joint commission to settle the question of when and where the first Methodist society in America was established. The result was a majority report that favored Maryland and a minority paper that voted for New York. Since that time many have felt constrained to say, as indicated above, that “the sources will not allow us to decide the issue.”

In 1960, evidence was found which indicates that there may have been a Methodist society in Leesburg, Virginia, about the same time that societies were being formed in New York and Maryland.

It is hoped that sooner or later documentary evidence will come to light which will settle beyond doubt the date and place of the organization of the first Methodist society in America.

Recommendations

Since the future rises out of the past; since historical continuity is a necessity; since a knowledge of history is a means of inspiration and strength; since the role of the past is to prepare men for the crisis of the present and the challenge of the future; since American Methodist history is verily an “endless line of splendor”; and since the history of American Methodism is not something dead and gone, but something alive, growing, and unfinished to which this generation of Methodists should make a worthy contribution, the Association of Methodist Historical Societies recommends the following procedures for celebrating the Bicentenary of American Methodism in 1966.

1. Since the first Sunday in January is now regarded as Methodist Heritage Sunday, it is recommended that on Sunday, January 2, 1966, or some other Sunday in that month, our pastors deliver
sermons in the churches appropriate for the celebration of the Two Hundredth Anniversary of American Methodism.

2. It is recommended that each annual conference in the United States arrange for a historical sermon, address, or paper sometime during its 1966 session and that the message be printed in its journal.

3. Together Magazine's numerous feature articles on Methodist history—many of them in full color—in the past four years, are commended, and this midmonth periodical for Methodists is requested to continue calling the attention of its readers to our history.

4. It is recommended that the Christian Advocate, Methodist Story, and other church papers, and our Church school literature appropriately emphasize the significance of the Bicentennial Celebration during the quadrennium, publishing at proper times Methodist historical material that will be useful and inspiring to pastors and laymen, and instructive to youth.

5. It is recommended that in so far as seems practical, pastors, churches, Church schools, Woman's Societies of Christian Service, and Methodist Youth Fellowships, make use of the historical booklet, the filmstrip, and the new three-volume History of American Methodism mentioned in this Report in their efforts to make the Two Hundredth Anniversary of American Methodism meaningful and helpful to the people.

6. It is recommended that a small booklet presenting in popular style the essential facts in the early history of American Methodism be prepared by the Association of Methodist Historical Societies in cooperation with the Methodist Publishing House. This booklet should include also a section that will serve as a Leader's Guide for the presentation or study of the new three-volume History of American Methodism. It is further recommended that a copy of this booklet be sent without charge to each pastor in the church, and that it be made available in quantity at modest cost for the use of study groups and for distribution among members of local churches. Some such publication appears essential if the local churches are to carry out the part of the 1964-1968 Quadrennial Program, which reads:

The local churches in the United States are urged in 1966 to give proper attention to the Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Beginning of Methodism in America, seeking to relate the historical significance of the spirit of the founding fathers to the problems and opportunities of twentieth century Methodism.

7. It is recommended that a filmstrip be prepared by the Association of Methodist Historical Societies in cooperation with TRAFCO showing the ten national shrines of Methodism and significant Methodist landmarks throughout the United States for use in the churches and Church schools during the Bicentenary Celebration.
8. Since Together Magazine prepared the “Methodist Americana” and “Methodist Europa” maps, there has been a felt need for a Methodist Guidebook with Maps which will show the location of the shrines and landmarks of American Methodism, indicate the highways leading to them, and present a brief but adequate history of each one, thus making it easily possible for travelers to find them and familiarize themselves with their history. It is recommended that such a Guidebook with Maps be prepared by the Association of Methodist Historical Societies in cooperation with the Methodist Publishing House, and that the Guidebook, along with the “Methodist Americana” and “Methodist Europa” maps be made available in Cokesbury Bookstores and advertised in the catalog of the Methodist Publishing House.

9. It is recommended that the Association of Methodist Historical Societies establish a scholarship fund, and that the Executive Committee of the Association grant one or more scholarships annually to students in our Methodist theological seminaries and universities for work on projects of significance to Methodist history.

10. Since the new three-volume History of American Methodism is one of the best and most complete works of its kind ever published, it is recommended that it be purchased by local churches which have libraries so that it will be available to members generally, that it be used during the quadrennium by study groups in local churches, and that pastors and other church leaders place it on their “must” reading lists.

11. During the Bicentenary Celebration, it is recommended that the church at large take note of two editorial projects which are of importance to Methodist history and of significance for World Methodism in the years ahead.

1) Four American Methodist universities—Drew, Duke, Emory, and Southern Methodist—are sponsoring the publication of an annotated, indexed, critical edition of the prose works of John Wesley, to be issued in about twenty-five volumes. Such an edition of Wesley’s Works has never been published and is long overdue. This publication will be of widespread interest and value in Methodism throughout the world, as well as of very great importance to scholars in colleges, universities, and theological seminaries. Our American Methodist Historical Societies on the national, jurisdictional, and annual conference levels are greatly interested in and are giving financial support to this notable editorial project. The first two or three volumes, consisting of John Wesley’s sermons, should come from the press by 1967.

2) The World Methodist Council and the Association of Methodist Historical Societies are jointly sponsoring the preparation of a Dictionary of World Methodism. This work in several volumes should be completed in 1966.
12. It is recommended that during the Bicentenary Celebration, *Methodist History*, the quarterly historical journal launched by the Association of Methodist Historical Societies in 1962, be publicized so that individuals, churches, libraries, and institutions interested in the history of Methodism may learn of and subscribe to the periodical.

13. It is recommended that the Association of Methodist Historical Societies and all the Jurisdictional Associations of Historical Societies hold a joint meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1966, the exact date to be fixed and the program to be arranged by the Executive Committee of the Association of Methodist Historical Societies. The president or some other officer of each Annual Conference Historical Society in the United States should be invited to the meeting with at least half of his expenses paid by the Association of Methodist Historical Societies. Representatives of the historical societies of other branches of Methodism in America and abroad should be invited, travel and entertainment to be at their own expense. The gathering should be well publicized so as to develop widespread interest and a good attendance of ministers and laymen, thus insuring an impact on American Methodism comparable to that made by the celebration of the Sesquicentennial of the Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Baltimore in 1934, and the Bicentennial of Aldersgate at Savannah in 1938. The program should consist of outstanding historical addresses and papers, and these should be published in *Methodist History*. If feasible, bus tours to Methodist shrines and landmarks in Philadelphia, New York, and other places should be arranged in connection with this gathering.

*Respectfully submitted,*

BISHOP T. OTTO NALL, President

ALBEA GODBOLD, Executive Secretary

Association of Methodist Historical Societies
to have the movie copied and to insert names and titles in the Association, and it was accepted. It is the purpose of the Association to preserve which has historical value. He offered the movie to the Executive Committee. Bishop Strongman reported to the Church at the United Conference. Bishop Strongman reported to the Methodist Association of Methodist Historical Societies at Pitsburg on April 27. There was a note about the Wesley Works Editorial Project in the April issue of Methodist History.

There was a note about the Wesley Works Editorial Project in

* * * *


We are glad to announce that the Committee in charge of the Dictionary of World Methodism has decided to produce the dictionary and meaningful to American Methodism. We trust that the revisions included in this 1966 volume of the Dictionary of World Methodism will be determined by the General Conference at Pittsburg. It is published in this volume of the Dictionary of World Methodism.

As instructed by the General Conference of 1966, the Association of Methodist Historical Societies drafted a plan for cooperation in

Notes
proper places. The film will be kept in the Association's library at Lake Junaluska.

* * * * *

The site of the Old Stone Church, Leesburg, Virginia, and Acuff's Chapel, near Kingsport, Tennessee, were designated as Methodist historical shrines by the General Conference at Pittsburgh.

* * * * *

A 16-page pamphlet on the Historical Shrines of American Methodism was published by the Association in April of this year. A copy was placed on the desk of each delegate to the General Conference at Pittsburgh and several thousand were taken by people who visited the combined exhibit of the Association and the World Methodist Council in the Civic Arena at Pittsburgh. This pamphlet gives a picture and a description of each shrine. The accounts point up the historical significance of the shrines.

* * * * *

The General Conference adopted legislation which says that henceforth nominations for Methodist historical shrines and landmarks are to be referred to the Association of Methodist Historical Societies. The Association, through its Committee on Shrines and Landmarks, will study and evaluate the buildings and places nominated and will make a report to the ensuing General Conference for such action as that body deems advisable.

* * * * *

The General Conference adopted legislation which divides buildings and places of Methodist historical significance under three heads: (1) shrines, (2) landmarks, and (3) sites. A shrine must have historical significance for the denomination as a whole, and it must have features which invite pilgrimages; in other words, there must be something at the place to see. A landmark, like a shrine, must have historical significance for the whole denomination, but unlike the shrine, it does not have features that invite pilgrimages; in other words, it is a place where events of importance in the history of Methodism took place, but now there is nothing there to see. Only the General Conference can designate buildings or places as shrines or landmarks. The term "Methodist historical site" is a category to be used by Jurisdictional and Annual Conferences. A Jurisdictional or an Annual Conference may, as it deems proper, designate any building or place as a Methodist historical site. Presumably this designation will be given to buildings and places that have special historical significance for Methodism within the conference, state, or region. If, as time passes, the Jurisdictional or Annual Conference believes that one of its historical sites is of sufficient importance to the denomination as a whole, it may place the site in nomination for designation as a
56 METHODIST HISTORY

shrine by the General Conference. The legislation provides that when a building or a place is designated as a Methodist historical site, the secretary of the conference shall notify the Association of Methodist Historical Societies, which shall register the historical site in an official record.

* * * * *

The General Conference adopted legislation providing that the Association of Methodist Historical Societies may enroll associate members. This means that the Association may develop a plan whereby individuals, on the payment of specified dues, will be enrolled as associate members, will receive Methodist History, pamphlets, and any other literature of a general nature which the Association puts out, and will be entitled to such other privileges as may be designated in the plan for associate members.

* * * * *

In accordance with the action of the Executive Committee of the Association of Methodist Historical Societies, the subscription price of Methodist History will go to $3.00, effective October 1, 1964. However, those persons who subscribe or renew their subscriptions prior to that time can do so for a period of one year at the old price of $2.00.