As American Methodism's Bicentennial year approaches, modern day Methodists may turn with interest to a summary of the events connected with the Centennial celebration in 1866. Special religious services were held throughout the church, and a financial campaign was staged that up to that time had not been equaled.

The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, at its session in Philadelphia in 1864, adopted the following preamble along with certain resolutions which set in motion an elaborate program:

Whereas, Methodism in the United States of America will complete the first century of its history in 1866; and
Whereas, Under the special blessing of God it has risen in power and extended in usefulness to a degree hardly paralleled in the history of the Church; and especially in view of the many thousands that have been saved through its instrumentality, and the influence it has exerted upon the theology of its times and the evangelization of the world, we deem it right to observe the closing period of this first Centenary with special solemnities and pious offerings, which shall present before God some humble expression of our devout gratitude, and lead to a renewed consecration of ourselves, our services, and means to the glory of our Divine Master.

The resolutions called for the celebration to begin on the first Tuesday in October, 1866, and to continue throughout the month. The primary object of the celebration was the spiritual improvement of the church members. Gratitude for blessings received was expected to be expressed through spontaneous offerings. Two objectives were placed before the people for their contributions—one connectional and the other local. The Board of Bishops appointed a General Committee of twelve preachers and twelve laymen, who with the bishops determined how the connectional funds should be appropriated. The local funds were to be administered by a committee of the annual conference in which the money was raised. The General Conference also resolved that “each Annual Conference shall provide for the delivery of a memorial sermon before its own body at the session next preceding the centennial celebration. . . .”

The ninth resolution of the General Conference said:

As the highest authority of the Methodist Episcopal Church we commend this whole subject to the prayerful consideration of every minister, traveling and local, and every official and private member of the Church, calling for the most systematic and energetic efforts every-where to carry out in their true spirit these noble plans; and after due consideration, we deem it right to ask for and to expect not less than two millions of dollars for achievements which will be worthy of our great and honored Church, and which shall show to our descendants to the latest generations the gratitude we feel for the

\footnote{Journal of the General Conference, M. E. Church, 1864, p. 445.}
wonderful Providence which originated and has so largely blessed and prosp­
pered our beloved Church.²

In accordance with these resolutions, the bishops appointed a
General Committee on which every section of the country was repre­
sented. This committee met first in Cleveland, Ohio, February 22,
1865, and adopted two resolutions. First, it requested Dr. Abel
Stevens “to prepare a Centenary volume . . . and Dr. John M’Clin­
tock . . . to cooperate by adding a chapter embodying the action of
the Centenary Committee. . . .”³ The second resolution called for
the appointment of a “Central Centenary Committee of Arrange­
ments and Correspondence.”

The General Committee met again on November 8, 1865, in New
York, and adopted final resolutions by which the Centennial pro­
gram would be guided. These resolutions covered the following
points:

1. A Centenary Educational Fund would be the foremost project
for connectional contributions.

2. Contributors could specify the object of their subscriptions by
naming one or more of the following:

a) The Centenary Education Fund.
b) The Garrett Biblical School of Evanston.
c) The Methodist General Biblical Institute at Concord, New Hampshire, to
be moved to the vicinity of Boston.
d) A Biblical Institute in the Eastern Middle States.
e) A Biblical Institute in Cincinnati or vicinity.
f) A Biblical Institute on the Pacific Coast.
g) Erection of Centenary Missionary buildings for the Mission House at
New York.
h) The Irish Connectional Fund.
i) The Biblical School at Bremen, Germany.
j) The Chartered Fund, to aid worn-out preachers, their widows and orphans.

3. All unspecified funds would go to the Centenary Educational
Fund.

4. The principal of the Centenary Educational Fund would be
invested, with the interest to be used to aid young men preparing
for the ministry or for foreign missionary work. These funds could
also be used to assist existing theological schools and universities,
colleges, and academies under the patronage of the church for pur­
poses other than building.

5. The bishops were authorized to appoint a “Centenary Connec­
tional Educational Board of the Methodist Episcopal Church,” to
consist of two bishops, four ministers, and six laymen, whose duty
it would be to administer the Centenary Educational Fund.

6. A Sunday-school children’s fund was established, to be vested
in and administered by the above Board, and the interest from this

² Ibid., p. 446.
fund was to be used to assist worthy students in gaining a more advanced education.

Central Centenary Committee

The Central Committee was the Centennial “work horse.” It became the duty of that committee not only to carry out the plans specified by the General Conference and the General Centenary Committee, but also to find the funds necessary for such a mammoth task. At this point the lay members of the committee—Oliver Hoyt, James Bishop, and C. C. North—became personally responsible for the funds needed to pay travel expenses, salaries, printing costs, and all other expenses that might be incurred.

Publication of a series of Centenary documents began, and the cooperation of the church press was sought. All of the Methodist editors met together and agreed to cooperate with each other and with the Central Committee.

The General Committee had appointed “Branch Committees” in all the principal cities, and the Central Committee proceeded to correspond with the presiding elders, asking them to name a Branch Committee in their respective districts. Its next step was to communicate with all the mission conferences and ask that they unite with the church at home in making Centenary offerings. Fraternal participation from other Methodist bodies in the United States and Canada was invited.

Throughout the planning especial care was taken so that there would be no conflict between the local and the connectional interests of the celebration. But as in most wide-spread ventures, either through lack of information concerning the plan or because of dominating local interests, some conferences dictated the disposition of funds, causing the successful outcome of the pecuniary features of the Centennial to be less than it might have been. Time and again emphasis was placed on the fact that the Centennial offering was to be in addition to regular collections and not a substitute for them.

Religious Services

To secure the spiritual improvement asked for in the General Conference resolutions, the General Committee set aside the first Sunday of January, 1866, “to be observed as a day of religious service for the special purpose of asking God’s blessing upon the Centenary year.” In many churches the services continued throughout the year, and large meetings were arranged for New York and vicinity, which were considered very successful.

4 Abel Stevens, The Centenary of American Methodism (New York: Carlton

American Methodism (New York: Carlton
Memorial sermons were a part of each annual conference program at the 1866 sessions, and on the local level other services were held under the direction of the presiding elders and the Branch Committees.

In every local church where there was a Sunday school, a special service was held in October, 1866, for a children's celebration of the Centenary. These were arranged by the Branch Committees in cooperation with the pastors and Sunday school officers.

The last Sunday in October was designated as a day for special Centenary thanksgiving services throughout the church.

The Rev. George Lansing Taylor composed six Centenary hymns, set to appropriate and familiar tunes. The Central Committee approved publication of the hymns in a little pamphlet and commended them to the churches "as embodying the spirit of the Centenary festival in lyrical forms well adapted for congregational use."³

Dr. Stevens' book, *The Centenary of American Methodism*, published in New York by Carlton & Porter late in 1865, was received with genuine approval. Many elaborate articles on the Centenary movement were written and published, among them a very able series by C. C. North, a lay member of the Central Committee.

**The Women of the Church**

What could have been more appropriate for the Centennial celebration than for the women of the church to organize behind a movement to honor Barbara Heck, "the mother of American Methodism"? In September, 1865, the women of Chicago organized the American Methodist Ladies' Centenary Association, and laid before the General Centennial Committee its plan for undertaking the special project of collecting $50,000 to be used for erecting a home for students at Garrett Biblical Institute at Evanston, Illinois. The building would be named Heck Hall. The General Committee approved the move and instructed the Central Committee to encourage such associations elsewhere, with the understanding that equal sums of money should be raised for Garrett and for the Biblical Institute of New England (later to become Boston Theological Seminary). All funds to be raised over and beyond the $100,000 were earmarked for the Centenary Educational Fund.

The Ladies' Association prevailed upon Abel Stevens to publish a book on the celebrated women of Methodism as a companion volume to his *Centenary of American Methodism*. This work, entitled *The Women of Methodism*, was published in two editions—one for general circulation and the other designed especially as a prize for those sending ten subscriptions to the fund of the Association.

In May, 1866, it was reported that the women of Boston and vicinity had organized a New England Branch of the Association, with the two theological schools to be the recipients of funds raised.

At the same time word was received that the ladies of New York and vicinity had organized the Ladies' Central Centenary Association and had selected as their special project the erection of a Mission House in New York. This particular project had been recommended by the General Committee, and the women of New York were anxious to see erected a suitable building where meetings could be held, social events scheduled for the missionaries, and rooms provided where the missionaries could be comfortably accommodated during their stay in that city.

The women of Cincinnati, meanwhile, had organized a Centenary Association and stated as their purpose the raising of funds for erecting a building for the Wesleyan Female College of Cincinnati.

"But for this Association, woman would have had no prominence in this Centenary movement. Centenary lectures and sermons were delivered without the slightest recognition of her influence in the history of the Church. . . . Every lady who sympathizes with this spirit is invited to give her name and influence to this Association. How many shall be reported down to 1966?" 6

Heck Hall was erected at a cost of approximately $50,000 and presented to Garrett Biblical Institute by the Ladies' Association formed for that purpose. It was dedicated July 4, 1867. "There were those who opposed the efforts for a thorough education of the ministry and predicted that because of it the Church would lose its simplicity, spirituality, and power." Bishop Davis W. Clark, in his dedicatory address, admirably vindicated the past and commended the present policy of education as eminently wise.7

A matching sum was contributed for the General Biblical Institute of New England, and that institution moved from Concord, New Hampshire, to Boston, where it reopened under the name of Boston Theological Seminary.

Drew Theological Seminary was founded in 1866 by Daniel Drew of New York. He proposed to give $500,000 for this purpose. Included in the gift were eighty acres of land, spacious buildings for the seminary, and residences for the professors. In addition he indicated that he would give $250,000 as a permanent endowment. The principal was never paid, but the interest on that amount was paid annually for nearly ten years. Reverses of fortune prevented Mr. Drew from fully carrying out his plans. According to the report to the General Conference of 1880, however, his total gifts amounted to about $600,000, and he advanced the enterprise to such a point that its

6 The Ladies Repository, 1866, p. 571.  
future success was certain. The school was formally opened in November, 1867, with Dr. John M'Clintock as president.  

**Children's Celebration**

A Sunday school children's fund was established for the purpose of assisting worthy students in obtaining a higher education. Each annual conference was to share in the proceeds of this fund according to the number of Sunday school children under its care. The fund was to be vested in and administered by the Board of Trustees authorized by the General Conference.

This fund and the Board responsible for it were the final stepping stones to the organization of the Board of Education of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which was finalized by the General Conference of 1868. It also led to the designation of the second Sunday in June as "Children's Day," which is still observed throughout the church.

Each Sunday school child who contributed one dollar to the Children's Fund, and each child who collected five dollars for the Fund were entitled to receive a medal. These medals bore the likeness of John Wesley on one side, with the words "Children's Medal," and that of Francis Asbury on the other side, with the inscription "Centenary of American Methodism, 1866."  

The Committee expected this fund to reach $250,000, and believed this goal would have been reached had there been no attempt to divert the children's efforts and offerings from the general plan. As it was, a total of $59,523 was reported as being in hand at the General Conference of 1868, and it was stated that additional subscriptions were being held in abeyance, awaiting the action of the General Conference on the organization of a Board of Education.  

**Mission House in New York**

The Missionary Society finally decided to become owner of one-fourth of the new buildings purchased by the Book Agents on the corner of Broadway and Eleventh Street in New York City. The Society already had some funds on hand, and it realized about $50,000 from Centennial subscriptions in 1866. The "New Mission House" was presented for use on November 11, 1869, and its debt was entirely liquidated in 1877. 

**Irish Fund**

The history of American Methodism reveals how great was the church's debt to Ireland. Barbara Heck, Philip Embury, Robert

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8 Ibid., p. 250.  
9 Stevens, op. cit., 265.  
Strawbridge, and countless others were prominent in the planting of Methodism in the new world. Irish Methodism in the mid-1800's lost annually by emigration to America more than its aggregate increase of membership. There were more Irish Methodists in America than in Ireland.\footnote{Methodist Quarterly Review, 1866, p. 179.}

The General Centennial Committee included in its connectional objectives a fund to be used for endowment purposes at the Methodist College in Dublin. The address of the Irish Wesleyan Conference to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1872 acknowledged the contribution:

In connection with your Centenary celebration about $50,000 were subscribed to this endowment fund. Of this more than $35,000 have been paid, and there is a reasonable hope that the balance will be realized. . . . When the proceeds of this amount shall be fully reaped, the efficiency of the collegiate department, and especially that for the training of the candidates for our ministry, will be greatly increased.\footnote{Journal of the General Conference, M. E. Church, 1872, p. 483.}

**Biblical School at Bremen, Germany**

Abel Stevens called upon American Methodists to support the Biblical School at Bremen, “remembering that the Palatine Irish, among whom Embury and his associates were trained, were not Romanists, but the children of German Protestants,” and that Wesley derived our Methodist view of practical and experimental religion from German sources. Stevens said, “With this sense of gratitude for the past let us consult our security for the future, by doing all we can to evangelize in their own home, the Germans who are to make up so large a part of the future American people.”\footnote{Stevens, op. cit., 261-262.}

The school which had been opened at Bremen, Germany, in 1858 outgrew its facilities, and in 1866 John T. Martin of Brooklyn, New York, donated $25,000 for a new building. Other Centennial contributions for the project were also received and sent to Germany. In 1867 the school was moved to Frankfurt and the name changed to Martin Mission Institute.\footnote{Matthew Simpson, Cyclopedia of Methodism (Philadelphia: Everts and Stewart, 1878), p. 564.}

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The Central Centenary Committee concluded its final report to the General Conference with the statement that the entire expenses of the Committee, including printing, medals, travel of the General Committee, stationery and postage, and the salary and travel of the secretary, did not exceed $15,000.\footnote{Journal of the General Conference, M. E. Church, 1868, p. 592.}

The General Committee’s report noted that the report of the Central Committee “contained matter for devout thanksgiving.”

\footnote{Journal of the General Conference, M. E. Church, 1868, p. 592.}
The General Conference of 1864 had asked of the Church at least two million dollars. The Church had responded with a grand total of $8,527,561.38, and it was believed that outstanding subscriptions would bring that total to more than ten million.\(^1\)

The Methodist Protestant Church

When the Methodist Episcopal Church outlined its plan to celebrate one hundred years of American Methodism, it invited other Methodist bodies to unite in the celebration. Methodist Protestants in Maryland liked the idea and the annual conference appointed a committee to carry out the plan. The committee worked diligently and efforts were made to secure subscriptions, but the project was not very successful. The total cash receipts, as reported to the Maryland Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, was $7,194.93, and a number of border-line reformists returned to the Methodist Episcopal Church.\(^2\)

Methodist Episcopal Church, South

At the 1866 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Thomas O. Summers, chairman of the Committee on the Centenary of American Methodism, submitted a report which was adopted and which read in part as follows:

> As the circumstances of our Church and country do not favor any demonstrations of such a nature as usually characterize centennial celebrations, and as no definite date can be assigned for the origin of Methodism in America in its inchoate character as a Wesleyan Society . . . the committee do not recommend that any formal centennial celebration take place until 1884; nevertheless, the committee recommend the Conference to adopt the following resolutions:

> **Resolved,** That this Conference, representing the ministers and members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, recognize with profound gratitude to Almighty God the amazing success which has attended the progress of Methodism in America, originating in movements so small, informal, and unpromising, about a hundred years ago.

> **Resolved,** That this Conference pledges the Church that it will, by God's help, reproduce on a larger scale, with more promising appliances, the zeal, energy, and success of former times, so that when the centennial celebration of our proper ecclesiastical organization shall be held in 1884, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, may exclaim with greater emphasis than ever, "What hath God wrought!"\(^3\)

The Methodists of 1966

References and messages to future Methodists were numerous. T. M. Eddy, in his article "The Centenary of Methodism," said:

> It is doubted if 1966 will bring so glorious an opportunity. Methodism comes now with a nation's blessing upon her head, amid the thanksgivings

\(^{1}\)Ibid., p. 593.  
of peace, and the grateful shouts of four millions of liberated sons of bondage; comes after a century of unexampled progress and of unmeasured prosperity to answer the question of her own heart: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" History shall record in what manner the question was answered. 20

Dr. Hiram Mattison made the following excellent suggestion:

With what interest will the Methodists of 1966 look upon every thing that may then exist which relates to our present Centenary celebration—books, pamphlets, sermons, proceedings of conventions, etc.? Now, as we are to have a fire-proof Centenary Mission Building—and we hope also a Centenary Book Room, all in one—we respectfully suggest that three copies of every book, circular, printed sermon, programme, report . . . that in any way relates to Centenary celebrations, general or local, be sent free of postage to Rev. William C. Hoyt, as the general depository of Centenary documents. By this simple process a collection of documents can be secured which will be of great use in the future, and which no money could buy a hundred years to come. 21

Abel Stevens closed his Centenary volume with this message:

Witnessed by the eyes of our posterity, when on the anniversary morning of October, 1966, they shall throng in redoubled hosts to their temples, and respond back over our graves to this anniversary epoch, and send forward to the next the anthems of our jubilee. God grant that the hymns of that morning may resound not only over this, but over both American continents, from Labrador to Terra del Fuego, and that the missions of Methodism may respond to them from all the ends of the earth! Our chief memorial of the epoch, as has been stated, is not to be a building but an institution—a Fund for Education; the interest of which alone is to be expended, the principal to be handed down as our salutation to the Methodists who shall assemble on that far-off morning. A more practicable or more sublime design is hardly possible to the denomination. Its other leading interests, like missions, Sunday-schools, etc., have the habitual sympathy and support of its people, but education can hardly expect such support. . . . Education needs permanent endowment, and a great educational fund, like that proposed, is of all Church interests the best fitted to be monumental. It can continually assist our existing seminaries and erect new ones, and yet its undiminished principal be transmitted as our benediction to the future. Let us then establish it on a scale worthy not only of the last, but of the next hundred years of our history. 22

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20 Methodist Quarterly Review, 1866, p. 187.
21 The Ladies Repository, 1866, p. 508.