The colophon of the Methodist Publishing House depicts a circuit-riding preacher, book in hand, on a high-stepping steed striding over the words "Since 1789." A history of American Methodist publishing, upon which we are at work, is planned to cover a 175-year span.

Seemingly, it is a task Horatio Alger, Jr., might have envied us—writing a business success story. It would start in 1789, that historic year when George Washington was inaugurated President in New York City where the five-year-old Methodist Episcopal Church of America also met and ordered John Dickins, a young Eton-schooled preacher with nose smudged by printer's ink, to go to Philadelphia and found the Methodist Book Concern. This he did—and ever after its career has been onward and, usually, upward.

In brief, that was it. But research barely began before we discovered the Algerian formula failed to fit. The Methodist Book Concern, now the Methodist Publishing House, did not erupt suddenly into existence under John Dickins' hand in 1789, like Minerva springing from the brow of Jupiter, fully formed, attired, and armed. Rather, it is a typical societal institution. It was born normally. It evolved from needs that elicited functional responses which by pragmatic selection firmed up into individual habits or group practices and eventually stiffened into systems and then, with specialized labor available, crystallized into a formal organization. Only in a limited way was early Methodist publishing in America an independent invention, to borrow a term from ethnology, for it followed closely a pattern developed in England. Actually, it was part of a trans-Atlantic extension of the socio-religious movement launched by the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., who ever was pleased to affix to his by-line the tag, "Sometime Fellow of Lincoln-College, Oxford."

A remarkable man, this founder of the Methodist movement. He stood five foot four, never weighed more than 125 pounds, yet faced violent mobs, often striding amongst them as he asked friendly questions of leaders. After an emotional catharsis in 1738, known as his Aldersgate experience, "he enjoyed the profoundest tran-

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quillity, whilst creating around him the most intense excitement.”

An intellectual, he had the human touch. Petulant Dr. Johnson once said, “I hate to meet John Wesley. The dog enchants you with his conversation and then breaks away to go and visit some old woman.”

His days began at 4 A.M. with an hour of reading. In 51 years he traversed 250,000 miles over England’s rutty and muddy roads to average fifteen sermons each week. He himself wrote 233 pamphlets and books, according to one count, and helped write or abridge some 150 more. Often he edited or read as he rode. “It must have been a remarkable sight . . . on the highways of England,” writes Thomas Walter Herbert, “a small man in scrupulously neat clerical dress, jogging somewhat awkwardly along the road, reins hanging loose on the horse’s neck, book in one hand and busy pencil in the other. . . .” With understanding mellowed by whimsy, one scholar remarked: “It is a wonder Mr. Wesley did not abridge the Gospel according to St. John.” He worked so expertly, Dr. Herbert opines, that were Wesley’s metered condensation of Milton’s Paradise Lost “the only extant record of the poem, its high rank among epics of world literature would remain unchanged.” Wesley’s Journal, says The Cambridge History of English Literature, has “all the charm of a pious Pepys” with the “rugged force of Walt Whitman.”

Wesley passionately believed “Reading Christians will be knowing Christians,” and he repeatedly, albeit hopefully, affirmed “Methodists think and let think.” His own works back up his intellectual catholicity for they range from poetry to logic, from economics to exegesis, from medicine to grammars in a half dozen languages as well as a New Testament translation said to anticipate later revisions at 3,000 points. Critics presently will have opportunity for appraisal by twentieth-century criteria, however, for the Clarendon Press has decided, but I believe not yet announced, to republish everything written by this distinguished son of Oxford.

8 Thomas Walter Herbert, John Wesley as Editor and Author (Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 3.
9 Green, op. cit., p. 171.
10 Herbert, op. cit., p. 79.
13 Wesley’s Journal VII, 389.
14 Herbert, op. cit., p. v.
ORIGINS OF METHODIST PUBLISHING IN AMERICA

The project is expected to involve some 30 volumes and fifteen to twenty years.\textsuperscript{16}

Wesley first broke into print with \textit{A Collection of Forms of Prayer for Every Day in the week}.
\textsuperscript{17} It was a devotional aid for Oxford students, especially that coterie of earnest young men under his leadership who were so methodical in studies, prayers, and good works as to be derisively dubbed the Holy Club or Methodists. On its publication in 1733 suspends the claim of the Epworth Press for longevity exceeded in Britain only by Oxford, Cambridge and Longmans, Green. Still going is the \textit{Methodist Magazine} which he launched as the \textit{Arminian Magazine}, in 1778.\textsuperscript{18}

Methodism began as a movement to reform the Church of England from within. After the American Revolution, which Wesley referred to as “a very uncommon train of providences” whereby God had “so strangely” given Americans governmental and ecclesiastical freedom, he gave an acquiescent nod to formation over here of the Methodist Episcopal Church.\textsuperscript{19} The year was 1784; English Methodists did not become a church till after his death in 1791. Doctrinally, early Methodism was so richly influenced by Wesley’s contact with Moravians during his two-year missionary stint in Georgia, it might be called German pietism with a British accent.\textsuperscript{20} But dynamics it did have. Historian W. E. H. Lecky thought the moral forces it loosed were a major reason England was spared revolution such as seared France.\textsuperscript{21} Queen Victoria’s first poet laureate, Robert Southey, termed Wesley “the most influential mind of the last century.”\textsuperscript{22}

How skilfully he organized his Methodist societies throughout the British Isles is attested by Thomas Babington Macaulay’s remark that Wesley’s “genius for government [was] not inferior to that of Richelieu.”\textsuperscript{23} There is no mystery about his techniques. He sought to propagate \textit{The Word} as it was vouchsafed to him not only by words spoken and heard but by words silent and seen. In short, preaching and publishing became reciprocating units in the Methodist organizational apparatus. Each circuit-riding preacher became a book salesman, every local Methodist society a book club. Scorning exhorters who grasshoppered from village to village, Wesley

\textsuperscript{16} Personal interview with Peter J. Spicer, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
\textsuperscript{17} Green, op. cit., no. I, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{18} Personal interview with Frank Cumbers. See his \textit{The Book Room} (London: Epworth Press, 1956), pp. 137, 144.
\textsuperscript{19} Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, \textit{Annually Held in America, from 1773 to 1794, inclusive}. (Philadelphia: Printed by Henry Tuckniss and sold by John Dickins, 1795), pp. 75-77.
\textsuperscript{22} Quoted in Fitchett, op. cit., p. 10.
held up Billy Penington as an exemplar. This is from a letter that might have come from a sales manager’s briefcase:

Billy Penington in one year sold more . . . in Cornwall than had been sold for seven years before. So may you, if you take the same method. Carry one sort of books with you the first time you go the round; another sort the second time; and so on. Preach on the same subject at each place; and, after preaching, encourage the congregation to buy and read the tract.²⁴

Wesley’s Methodist organization qualifies as a publisher under Chandler B. Grannis’ definition of publishing as “the whole intellectual and business procedure of selecting and arranging to make a book and of promoting its ultimate use.”²⁵ Wesley, himself, not only wrote or edited, but also for many years supervised printing of tracts and books. He kept them thin and small to hold down costs and to enable his preachers to pack a copious supply in their saddlebags. Stewards of local societies²⁶ kept accounts and made quarterly reports to their circuit-rider who forwarded them to the so-called “Book Room” in London.²⁷ Thus book writing, editing, manufacturing, promotion, accounting, sales, and distribution were fused functionally into the Methodist movement that spread to America in the 1760’s.

We must, however, give attention to even earlier manifestation of the itch to print so characteristic of “people called Methodists”—which is Wesley’s own phrase.²⁸

The year is 1737; the place, Charleston, South Carolina; the item to note, a 74-page duodecimo titled A Collection of Psalms and Hymns issued anonymously but written by John Wesley.²⁹ It was printed by Lewis Timothy, né Louis Timothée, the Huguenot refugee Benjamin Franklin sent from Philadelphia to South Carolina too late to collect a £1,000 subsidy as the colony’s first printer and whose story has been well recorded both by Franklin and by Douglas C. McMurtrie.³⁰

A Collection of Psalms and Hymns is America’s first Methodist-related imprint. It was prepared at least in part for the society he had founded, in April 1736, at Savannah and which he calls a “rise”

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²⁴ Wesley’s Letters IV, 282.
²⁸ From A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists (Bristol: Printed by F. Farley, 1749). See Green, op. cit., no. 126, p. 60.
²⁹ Green, op. cit., no. 6, p. 11.
of Methodism second only to the original campus club at Oxford. Moreover, with six of the Charleston book's fifty-two hymns in the Methodist hymnal in use today, it stands as an organic ancestor of that best seller. But it has another claim to ecclesiastical fame. The late and great hymnic authority, Dr. John Julian, having discounted claims of two metrical versions of Psalms by Jeremy Taylor and George Herbert, acclaimed the 1737 volume also as "the first collection of hymns published for use in the Church of England." In all the world, it seems, only two copies of this 1737 Collection survive. Even its existence was long doubted, though in a 1740 edition of Athenae Oxonienses Wesley had listed it as published in 1736. Bibliographers assumed 1736 was a typographical error because in 1738 he had published in London a book with the same title and did so again in 1741. Further to confuse scholars, he reissued the 1741 version in 1743 as "A second edition enlarged." But in 1878, W. T. Brooke, while strolling one autumn evening in London bought from a bookshop the unpretentious 1737 item for half a guinea. How from internal evidence, such as poems translated from the German, he identified it as Wesley's work, and how he confounded, then jollied, his book-collector friends make his narrative a classic of bibliomania. Eventually he sold the book for five pounds—a ridiculously high price, he thought. But in 1904 it fetched £106 at auction. Today it is the most treasured item in the basement strong-room of the Epworth Press, 25 City Road, London, and is graciously shown to qualified visitors by the archivist, John C. Bowmer.

The other copy, also worth its weight in gold dust, was presented to the New York Public Library in 1899 by Alexander Maitland. Qualified scholars armed with nothing more lethal than a pencil may

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31 Wesley's Journal I, 198.
32 An unpublished study, 1964, made by Paige Carlin, Managing Editor of Together Magazine.
35 Edited by Anthony à Wood; see Green, op. cit., no. 2, p. 10; also G. Osborn's preface to the facsimile reprint of the 1737 hymnal, issued by the Wesleyan Book-room (London: T. Woolner [1882]). A true facsimile reprint of the London copy was issued in 1964 by the Wesley Historical Society (London) and the Dalcho Historical Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in South Carolina.
approach but not touch it. A striking variation from the London copy was first noted by Dr. Frederick E. Maser, Philadelphia clergyman and bibliophile, the London version being known to him through Dr. G. Osborn’s 1882 facsimile (in part) reprint. Topping the title page of the New York copy is the word “A”; the London copy has in its place a printer’s decoration such as country printers sometimes call a dingbat.

Were there, Dr. Maser excitedly wondered, two printings? Perhaps some collector or library owns another copy incorrectly indexed or clumsily filed! Such ideas put gleams in eyes of zealots who spend joyous hours tracing tailless commas, battered letters, or miscegenated pages. But ladies and gentlemen, rest easy. The Great Dingbat Mystery has been solved. And as I may be the only person ever to examine both known copies of the book, I tell all. A party unknown had inked his name at the top of the London copy’s title page; someone had snipped off both it and the letter “A” to expose a part of the decorative design on the page beneath, and a bumbling photographer, preparing copy for the 1882 reprint, simply shot what he saw. The solution was simple, for the deduction was obvious as Dr. Watson would agree—and the Dingbat Mystery is now a closed case. (Plate III.)

Oddly, this 1737 hymn book laps like a breaking wave on our next personality, the Rev. George Whitefield, the prestigious orator. The great Garrick heard him preach the same sermon forty times and did not weary, so he said. Whitefield’s organ-like tones could melt an audience merely by saying Mesopotamia, Garrick declared and vowed he would give a hundred guineas could he as effectively voice the word “O”! Benjamin Franklin put Whitefield into American folklore with his autobiographical anecdote about how, despite his resolve not to contribute to an orphanage in Georgia, Whitefield’s oratory won first his copper, then his silver and finally, “I empty’d my pocket wholly into the collector’s dish, gold and all.”

In 1740 Whitefield was in Georgia to start an orphan house. To Lewis Timothy’s son Peter, who had taken over the family print shop at Charleston, this was news and more. With the quick reflex of a village printer pressed by creditors he saw a chance to turn into cash those old Wesley hymn books gathering shelf dust. So in his South Carolina Gazette for 8 Mar. 1740, he inserted this note:

To be sold by the Printer hereof, price 5s A Choice Collection of Psalms and Hymns, By the Rev. Mr. Wesley, Itinerant Preacher in England and Predecessor to the Rev. Mr. Whitefield.
Peter Timothy's hunch on Whitefield's newsworthiness proved out, profitably no doubt. In July that divine was arrested for publicly declaring Archbishop Tillotson "knew no more about Christianity than Mahomet" and as for local clergy, they "broke their canons daily." 

Whitefield's linkage with the Methodist succession in America seems solid. He had been a member of the original Methodist club at Oxford, and as late as 1768 when six students there were expelled for Methodistical "enthusiasm," he defended them in a tract published in this country. Welcomed by Jonathan Edwards and other Calvinists active in the New Awakening, Whitefield did not lack for pulpits in America yet did organize a few societies on the Methodist pattern. He lies in a Presbyterian crypt at Newburyport, Massachusetts, but the formal funeral sermon back in England was at his own request preached by John Wesley. So despite theological and ecclesiastical ambivalence, we deem Whitefield's publications on these shores as proper entries in the Preliminary Checklist of 18th Century Methodist-Related Imprints in America, being prepared as an aid to and a by-product of the history of American Methodist publishing.

In 1738 no Methodist published a book in America. But for 1739 Isaiah Thomas' History of Printing lists ten by Whitefield. In 1740 the number jumped to twenty-six—and thereafter the indefatigable Charles Evans has shown that till Whitefield's death in 1770 his journals and sermons and polemical pamphlets appeared with irregular frequency. In the considered judgment of historian Wil-

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1740," South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine, July 1933, XXXIV, 132.


45 George Whitefield, A Letter to the Reverend Dr. Durell . . . (London, Printed, 1768. Boston, New-England: Re-printed and sold by Thomas and John Fleet, at the Heart and Crown, in Cornhill, 1768). Six students, carrying on the Methodist tradition at Oxford, were publicly expelled from Edmund Hall, 11 Mar. 1768. The act was strongly condemned by Whitefield with a defense of extemore praying, hymn singing, lay preaching, and "enthusiasm." "I take it for granted, Reverend Sir, that you need not be apprized that I am one of these Methodists; and blessed by God I have had the honor of being one for about thirty-five years. If this be vile, may I be more vile!"—p. 13.


47 A Sermon on the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield. Preached at the Chapel in Tottenham-Court-Road, and at the Tabernacle, near Moorfields, on Sunday, November 18, 1770. By John Wesley. Green, op. cit., no. 266, p. 150.

48 Isaiah Thomas, The History of Printing in America (Albany: Joel Munsell, 1874), II, 449.

liam Warren Sweet, he was “the connecting link between the revival
movement in England and America.” His career in America over­
lapped lightly on the young missionaries who came in the 1760’s and
1770’s, warm and nascent, from the matrix of Methodism, their ears
ringing with Wesley’s admonition: “Take care that every society is
duly supplied with books.”

We note, first, irrepresible Robert Williams. No documents exist
to show this young Irishman had kinship with a leprechaun or kissed
the Blarney Stone, but circumstantial evidence is strong. Learning
that a friend was about to sail from Dublin for America, Williams
sold his horse to pay debts, tucked a loaf of bread and a bottle of
milk under one arm, his saddle under the other, and hurried to the
dock just in time to persuade the man to buy his passage. In
Philadelphia, his winsome ways won the tiny Methodist society
which not only paid his laundry, “shrub,” and other personal bills,
but also underwent a printing project. We know it included a hymn
book because Old St. George’s Cash Book records on 7 Oct. 1769,
that it paid “to Jno. Dunlap for printing 300 hymns” one pound and
five shillings—with a later purchase of 100 more for five shillings.

Which of Wesley’s fifty-odd hymn collections was this, the first
Methodist-commissioned imprint of record in America?

Dr. Francis J. Tees, who studied the problem, concluded it was
Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Intended for the Use of Real Christians
of all Denominations, a 132-page book originally published at
Bristol in 1753, which by 1786 had gone through twenty-four edi­
tions. In 1770 it was “re-printed” by John Dunlap at Phila­
delphia, but that date could be plausibly reconciled with the 1769
Cash Book entry on grounds of a prudent insistence that Methodists
pay cash in advance.

The Dunlap 1770 “re-print” identifies with the Bristol four­
teenth edition of 1768 on two curious points. First, both are “By John
Wesley, M.A.” (the by line used in editions from eighth through
thirteenth) but also carry “Late Fellow of Lincoln-College, Ox­
ford.” The Dunlap imitation even repeated “Fourteenth Edition,”

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50 William Warren Sweet, Methodism in American History, Rev. ed. (Nash­
51 William Myles, A Chronological His­
tory of the People Called Methodists . . .
52 Jesse Lee, A Short History of the
Methodists in the United States of Amer­
ica: beginning in 1766, and continued
till 1809 (Baltimore: Magill & Clime, 1810),
P. 27.
53 Francis H. Tees, The Beginnings of
Methodism in England and in America
54 Green, op. cit., p. 82.
55 Also reprinted in 1770 by Melchior
Steiner of Philadelphia; see Evans Ameri­
can Bibliography Supplement (Checking
Edition), ed. Roger P. Bristol (Charlottes­
ville, Virginia: Bibliographical Society of
the University of Virginia, 1982[84]), p.
200.
56 Two copies are known to exist—one
in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania,
one in the Library of the Methodist Pub­
lishing House at Nashville.
which perhaps could be explained by inexperience of either the publisher or Robert Williams in literary piracy.

Identification of Dunlap’s 1770 *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* with the 1769 *Cash Book* entry, however, was weakened by a doubt—then demolished by a fact.

The doubt: How could one pound and ten shillings pay for printing 400 copies of a 132-page book? 57

The fact: Long overlooked at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania a copy of an anonymous 24-page booklet:

*Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord.* Bristol printed;—And, Philadelphia, Re-printed, by John Dunlap, at the Newest-printing Office, in Market-Street, M,DCC,LXIX.

Evans’ *Bibliography* missed it but not the *National Union Catalog*, which properly ascribed it to John Wesley. First issued probably at Bristol, England, in 1745 *Hymns for the Nativity* went through numerous editions. 58 Two were in Dublin, where quite probably Robert Williams stuffed copies in his pockets as he hurried to the ship that would take him to America. Correlation of this 24-page item on date, printer, and cost seems adequately to establish it—till new evidence turns up—as the first book commissioned by and printed for Methodists in America. (Plate IV.)

Robert Williams’ success with this and other unauthorized reprints sorely annoyed Mr. Wesley, whose complaints 59 precipitated action by the ten American “preachers in connection with” him. Meeting in the first Methodist conference in America, at Philadelphia, June 1773, they decided Williams could sell books on hand but must abide by this new rule: “None of the preachers in America to reprint any of Mr. Wesley’s books, without his authority (when it can be got) and the consent of their brethren.” 60

That final phrase “consent of their brethren,” proved unexpectedly pregnant with significance for the future. It meant, said Jesse Lee, first American Methodist historian, that the preachers should “be all united in the same cause of printing and selling our books, so that the profits arising therefrom, might be divided among the preachers, or applied to some charitable purpose.” 61 This principle spelled out in 1773 is still operative—and basic to the Methodist Publishing House. Every year its excess of income over expense is

57 This question was raised by Edwin Schell, Executive Secretary, Methodist Historical Society of the Baltimore [Md.] Annual Conference, in a 4 Sept. 1963, letter.

58 Green, op. cit. (no. 84, p. 44), notes more than twenty.


60 Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America, from 1773 to 1794 (Philadelphia: Henry Tuck-niss, 1795), p. 6.

61 Lee, op. cit., pp. 48-49.
distributed to pension funds for "wornout preachers, their widows and orphans." 62

Canny as they were with pence and pounds, those preachers of 1773 could hardly have been unaware that America had a growing market for John Wesley's works. As early as 1740, the 207-page Hymns and Sacred Poems by John and his brother Charles Wesley had been printed in Philadelphia by A. Bradford, and sold well.63 The most popular Wesley item, however, was Primitive Physick: or An Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases—the "primitive" said to be reference to Wesley's own observations of herbal medicines used by Indians in Georgia. By 1774, this book had gone through twenty editions, four of them in America! 64 But in 1773 the minuscule Methodist movement was less concerned about the secular market for their founder's works, than patronage of and influence among its own people.

Here shows the hand of Thomas Rankin, an amply nosed Scotsman on a "Dear Tommy" status with Wesley, who sent him to America to regularize Methodist affairs. Ten years of riding English circuits had jolted into his bones the Wesleyan formula for Methodist action—the partnership of press and pulpit. One gets a glimpse of this efficient man at work in these two entries in his as yet unpublished Journal:

Sunday, September 4th, 1774: This was a day of rest, and a consolation to my soul. In unpacking the books sent from London, and also in packing 5 boxes to send to Virginia, Maryland, and the Jerseys.

Nov. 23, 1774: Wed. I rode to Philadelphia. The remaining part of the week, as well as Sunday, was spent in usual labors, besides writing many letters and sending of books to the country circuits.65

Obviously, Rankin was pushing books as he was told to do. But how he tried faithfully to transplant to America Wesley's book-steward system is a story I can tell only because in 1958, Edwin Schell, the lanky and scholarly curator of the Lovely Lane Methodist Church Museum in Baltimore, was ancestor hunting in archives of the Protestant Episcopal Church.66 His quarry was a grandmother's preacher uncle who had moved from the Methodist to the Episcopal fold. Thumbing through ancient papers Mr. Schell suddenly stopped and stared. His tremulous hands held manuscripts of Minutes of Methodist conferences from 1774, 1775, 1776, and 1777. "And it was a bit like discovering Dead Sea scrolls, Methodist

63 Green, op. cit., p. 206.
65 The manuscript of Thomas Rankin's Journal is a prized possession of Garrett Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois.
66 Diocesan Library, Peabody Institute, Baltimore, Maryland.
style,” he says. What most excited him was that these contain much material not in the Minutes from 1773 to 1785 first collected and printed in 1795—particularly this passage:

Q. 7th. Who are appointed for Book-stewards in each Circuit.

John Staples
Joseph Toy
James Coppen
Wm. Moore
Jno. Hagerthy
Seth Mabry

The list was followed by these statements: “James Kinnear is general steward at Philadelphia. For every assistant [preacher] to leave a regular account of the Books in the round [circuit] for the succeeding assistant and also to bring the money in hand to the general steward. Every round to be supplied with class papers & tickets from the Book-Steward in Philadelphia.”

There can be no doubt of the authenticity of these manuscript Minutes. They are in the hand of William Duke, a young Methodist preacher who remained an Anglican and became professor at St. Johns College, Annapolis. They are duplicated, except for addition of Wright Brickell as a circuit book steward, in minutes kept by the well-known Philip Gatch discovered only months ago. Rediscovered is the better word, because Raymond Bell, a science professor at Washington and Jefferson College whose avocation is Methodist lore, found them printed in the Western Christian Advocate, of Cincinnati, for 26 May 1837.

What these minutes seem plainly to say in the old English Methodist idiom is that in 1775 John Wesley’s followers in America, under Thomas Rankin, tried to organize their publishing interests. In Philadelphia a dispensary for books and supplies was under James Kinnear, the general Book-Steward, with distributive outlets through six or seven circuit book stewards. Research is fleshing out their names to reveal them as dedicated laymen strategically spotted from New York to Virginia. And General Steward James Kinnear, I take pleasure in reporting, emerges from the blur as a very real person. I first cut his trail in the Old St. George’s Cash Book, wherein an entry for 10 Oct. 1771 reports a collection taken in his home. Perhaps on a cold night worshippers moved from an unheated church to his elegant many-windowed home kitty-corner from the back door of St. George’s. Advertisements in the

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67 In an interview with Edwin Schell in 1963.
68 See his Remarks Upon Education, with Respect to the Learned Languages . . . (Philadelphia: Ormond & Conrad, 1795).
69 Philip Gatch, Minutes for 1775, Western Christian Advocate, 19 May 1837, p. 2.
show it also was a vendue or auction house with, no doubt, ample warehouse space for Methodist tracts and books.

Not once is Kinnear mentioned in Rankin's *Journal*, however, although in the period from 17 Dec. 1775 to 22 Feb. 1777 are seven entries about packing and shipping books, chiefly from Philadelphia. Why did Kinnear so suddenly return to oblivion? We hope further research will beam a candle on the problem, but meanwhile we suggest six possible explanations:

First, as a professional auctioneer he may have been too commercial-minded for Rankin, who had chastised Williams for such a fault in 1773.

Second, Kinnear may have broken politically with Tory-minded Rankin, for he swore allegiance to Pennsylvania as a State.

Third, Kinnear may have found it impractical, even dangerous, to traffic with Methodists while red-coat dragoons lounged around, his shop being a scant block from St. George's, then a 53 x 82-foot brick shell with dirt floor which had been commandeered by the British as a riding stable.

Fourth, for such reasons, or others, his business may have declined. Later his vendue was sold, apparently under distress conditions.

Fifth, Kinnear may even have carried on effectively as General Steward—but no records extant happen to prove it.

Sixth and lastly, I note in approved sermonic manner, Francis Asbury, who became bishop when the church was born in 1784, may have lowered the ecclesiastical boom. For Kinnear was a Rankin man, and Rankin-Asbury relations were marked by what one commentator called "strained compatibility." Their differences ranged from personal to political. Rankin was John Bullish. In that dread winter of 1777-78, with Washington at Valley Forge, Rankin basked in Anglican and British military favor in Philadelphia while Asbury hid out in Delaware: of eight preachers Wesley

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76 Asbury's *Journal* I, 80 n.

sent to America, he alone had cast his lot with the patriots. Under his genius for leadership, Methodism—though a Johnny-come-lately among denominations—actually increased during the Revolution from 3,148 in 1775 to 18,000 by 1785, and by 1816 when he was gathered unto his fathers, it had raced on to a quarter-million members and was far along toward becoming America’s largest Protestant sect. But Kinnear was not Asbury’s man. Asbury’s three-volume Journal and Letters are honeycombed with references to books being imported, printed, and distributed, without mention of Kinnear. And as already noted, Kinnear’s 1775 appointment as Book Steward is omitted from the collected Minutes issued under Asbury’s direction in 1795.

Why? I have no solid explanation. But aware of Asbury’s mettle I incline less to pique than the simple motive of a man seeking to cut printing costs by deleting data on dead-end developments.

So it stands—one of many mysteries that vex and tantalize as we trace the rise of a publishing house which today, with its Abingdon Press and Cokesbury stores, employs more than 2,000 persons. But the enigma wrapped in the wooliest mystery is its own date of origin. The most recent church history accepts 1789, a date commonly linked to the anecdote, dating from 1792, about how John Dickins transferred $600 from his pocket to the denomination’s till to start the Book Concern. But historian Jesse Lee in 1810 noted, with no known contemporary dissent, that Dickins was in New York in 1783 as pastor and “superintendent of our Book business.” And twice in 1786 Asbury refers in his Journal to a going “Book Concern.”

When do those who publish become publishers, anyway! Perhaps we’ll never do better than did the editor of the Christian Advocate who on 10 Oct. 1828, first pegged down the year 1789. Ezekiel Cooper, Dickins’ successor, demurred in the next issue. Several books had been published before that date, he said, whereupon the editor weasled his way out by saying 1789 was the first year for which he could find account books.

Well, I suppose we should drop the matter there. But you will understand why our hopes zoom each time an attic explorer reports new discovery of old Methodistica!

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78 Sweet, op. cit., pp. 65, 81, 92. One of them, James Dempster, did remain, however, becoming a Presbyterian minister. See History of American Methodism, op. cit., I, 141.


81 Tees, op. cit., pp. 183-84.

82 Lee, op. cit., p. 253.


84 Even as this paper was being written, a Virginia clergyman, Melvin Steadman, reported finding in an attic a third set of manuscript Minutes of Methodist Conferences, 1775-1783!