METHODIST BEGINNINGS IN LOUISIANA

By Nola Mae McFillen

Prior to 1807, all efforts to take Methodism into Louisiana proved futile. After that date Methodist circuit riders managed to gain entrance to this strange land of bayous, swamps, and marshland, but even then they experienced difficulty in winning converts and establishing societies. Bishop H. N. McTyeire later wrote:

The gospel ploughshare never struck into harder soil than in Louisiana. Elsewhere in the valley of the Mississippi the itinerant preacher sowed the seed of the gospel in virgin soil; but in Louisiana tares had been long and plentifully scattered and cultivated.1

At the outset other Protestant denominations fared no better than the Methodists, for Louisiana, first under French, then Spanish, and then again French dominion, was predominantly Roman Catholic, and Protestantism was forbidden by law. In 1792, an Episcopalian priest tried to minister to the people of Louisiana, but "this clergyman, Adam Cloud, was brought to New Orleans in chains for conducting non-Roman Catholic services in a Spanish Dominion. Baron de Carondelet gave him the choice of going to prison in Spain, or leaving Spanish territory forever. He chose the latter." 2 In 1789, Joseph Willis, a mulatto, preached a short time for the Baptists at Vermillion, but he was soon stopped by the authorities.

Immediately following the surrender of Natchez in 1798, Bishop Francis Asbury, who believed in blazing new trails as soon as frontiers were opened up, "determined to send a missionary to that far-off moral waste," with the aim of eventually entering Louisiana. Asbury chose Tobias Gibson for the assignment and told him to proceed to Natchez "as soon as the rigors of the winter were past." Taking the long way south in January, 1799, Gibson—

traveled on horseback about six hundred miles to the Cumberland settlements of Tennessee, about where the city of Nashville stands, at which place he put his belongings into a canoe and descended the Cumberland to the Ohio, and then into the Mississippi, where he was probably taken up by a flatboat and landed at Natchez about the last of March, 1799.3

During the next few years Gibson labored faithfully and succeeded in laying the foundations of Methodism in the Natchez area. It is doubtful, however, that he ever crossed the Mississippi River into the "great wilderness" of Louisiana before April 5, 1804, when "he was admitted into full connection on high." 4

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1 H. N. McTyeire, History of Methodism, pp. 548-549.
4 R. H. Harper, Louisiana Methodism, p. 6. (original manuscript)
During Tobias Gibson's time in Natchez the Spaniards held the colony of Louisiana. In 1800 Napoleon restored Louisiana to France, and a law was enacted which said that only Roman Catholicism could be practiced in the colony.

In 1803, Lorenzo Dow, who at one time was a Methodist preacher but was discontinued on the ground of "being wholly unfitted to the work," and who was also one of the most eccentric and picturesque figures in early American Protestantism, ventured from Georgia into the section of Louisiana known as West Florida. His autobiography says that he sold his "cloak in the edge of West Florida."

Before leaving the region, Dow, the "son of thunder whose voice was heard in practically every section of the land,"\(^5\) crossed the Mississippi and held religious meetings in that part of Louisiana. Before going back to Georgia Dow "desired to secure Spanish horses," so he went further into Louisiana, probably into the Atakapas Indian Country. He wrote the following notes about his conquest of the Spanish horses:

> We ... procured three Spanish horses, which had been foaled wild in the woods, and had been caught out of the gang, by climbing a tree and dropping a noose over the head, it being made fast to a bough.

> Our horses were tamed and taught to eat corn, by forcing it into their mouths. Prepared with a tent and provisions, we bid the settlement ... adieu, and betook to the woods for Tombigbee.\(^6\)

On April 30, 1803, the United States bought the vast Louisiana Territory (885,000 square miles) from France for $15,000,000. As soon as the great region became a part of the United States, Asbury, the pioneer ecclesiastical statesman, was alert to the possibilities of extending Methodism west of the Mississippi. When he presided over the South Carolina Conference in 1804, Louisiana was the subject of considerable discussion and speculation. Asbury knew that if he was to establish Methodism in what is now the state of Louisiana he must send a preacher of deep piety, good talents, and indomitable courage, one capable of braving both physical and moral difficulties.

William McKendree, presiding elder in the Western Conference which included Mississippi and Louisiana at the time, was also aware that it would require a preacher of more than ordinary ability and devotion to plant Methodism in Louisiana. McKendree's choice was Learner Blackman, a man who—

was not content merely to make his regular rounds on his circuit, or simply take charge of this or that society. He was a progressive man, not satisfied with what he had in hand, but determined to gain all he could and to go into the regions beyond and lead as many lost sinners to the Savior as possible.\(^7\)

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\(^7\) Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 4. (Quoted in R. H. Harper's original manuscript.)
In 1804 Bishop Asbury appointed Learner Blackman as presiding elder of the Natchez District which included the Circuit of Louisiana recently formed—on paper! At the time there was still a Spanish garrison in Baton Rouge. But determined to establish Methodism across the Mississippi River, Blackman as presiding elder appointed in 1806 Elisha W. Bowman as missionary to Louisiana. Though warned that Louisiana consisted of “unpromising and dangerous expanses of prairie, canebrakes, pathless forests, lagoons, lakes, bayous, mud, and water, with any imaginable quantity of flies, mosquitoes, gnats, alligators, and carnivorous animals, with a sparse population, mostly of foreign descent, language, and religion,” 8 Bowman accepted the appointment.

“The Ungodly City”

The Western Conference raised one hundred dollars for Bowman’s outfit and expenses as a circuit rider. He then went to New Orleans where he spent some time in what seemed to him a fruitless effort to get a respectable hearing as a Protestant minister:

New Orleans at this time contained about twelve thousand inhabitants, including all classes; and such an amalgamation of all races of men, with all shades of complexion, perhaps could not be found elsewhere on the continent. The controlling majority was of French and Spanish descent and language, and universally Roman Catholics or infidels. 9

In January, 1806, Bowman wrote a long letter to William Burke, a preacher in Lexington, Kentucky, describing his trials, his failure in New Orleans, and his efforts to find some other place in Louisiana where his ministry would be more favorably received:

New Orleans lies extremely low . . . and from its low situation is as filthy as a hogsty . . . When I reached the city I was disappointed in finding but few American people there, and a majority of that few may truly be called the beasts of men. There are a few families that are called respectable, and these are Episcopalians, and they have a preacher of their own, a Mr. Chase, from Baltimore. He arrived . . . about the time I left the Conference (Nov. 1805).

I went to the Governor and told him my business. He promised me protection and told me I should have the capital of the city to preach in . . . but on Sunday when I came to the capitol, I found all the doors locked . . . I found a few drunken sailors and Frenchmen about the walks of the house, and I preached to them in the open air.

The next day I went to the Governor and Mayor . . . and they then promised to issue an order for the house to be opened and placed at my service. The next Sunday, when I came with my landlord . . . we found the doors again locked, and I again preached to ten or twelve persons in the open air.

I went again to the officers; but got not satisfaction. In the evening as I passed along the street, I heard them pouring out heavy curses on the Methodists, and saying “He is a Methodist; lock him out. The Methodists are a dangerous people, and ought to be discouraged.”

The next Sunday I preached to a few straggling in this city . . . I sought

* Ibid., p. 9.
in vain for a house to preach in. Several persons offered to rent me a house, but I had no money to rent a house. My expenses... were two dollars a day for myself and horse, and my money was pretty well spent. I tried to sell my horse, but could not get forty dollars for him...

Thus I was in this difficult situation, without a friend to advise me. I was three hundred miles from Brother Blackman, and could get no advice from him; and what to do, I did not know.

I could have no access to the people, and to go back to Natchez is to do nothing, as there was a sufficient supply of preachers for that part; and to leave my station without Mr. Asbury's direction was like death to me, and to stay there I could do nothing.

But by enquiring, I heard of a settlement of American people about two hundred miles to the west and northwest. By getting a small boat and crossing the lakes I could reach the Opelousas country; and as I was left to think by myself, I thought this most advisable.

I accordingly, on the 17th day of December, 1805, shook off the dirt from my feet against this ungodly city of Orleans, and resolved to try the watery waste and pathless desert.10

Bowman's Letter to Burke continued with an account of his hazardous journey through marshes, bayous, and lakes until he reached Opelousas where he found—

a few Americans who were swearing with almost every breath; and when I reproved them for swearing, they told me that the Priest swore as hard as they did. They said he would play cards with them and dance with them every Sunday evening after mass! And strange to tell, he keeps a race-horse! In a word, practices every abomination. I told them plainly if they did not quit swearing they and their Priest would go to hell together.... There are no laws to suppress vice of any kind, so that the Sabbath is spent in frolicking and gambling.11

Going a little farther Bowman came to a settlement of American people who had gone to Louisiana about the time of the Revolutionary War, "but not for any good deeds they had done." Bowman wrote of them:

They knew very little more about the nature of salvation than the untaught savages. Some of them, after I preached to them, asked me what I meant by the fall of man, and when it was that he fell!

Thus they are perishing for lack of knowledge and are truly in a pitiable condition. I have to teach them to sing, and in fact do everything that is like worshipping God. I find it also very difficult to get them to attend meetings, for if they come once they think they have done me a very great favor....

O, my God, have mercy on the souls of this people!12

Bowman declared that three-fourths of the inhabitants of Louisiana were French and that they were dissatisfied with the American government. "We have a constant talk of war. The Spaniards are fortifying themselves all around the coast, and three-fourths of the people here hope they will get this country again. This I hope, will never be the case."

On the whole Bowman found his experiences with the people,

10 John G. Jones, A Complete History of Methodism as connected with the Mississippi Conference of the M. E. Church, South, pp. 148-152.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
the weather, and the traveling conditions in Louisiana discouraging. His long letter to Burke in Kentucky concluded with the following paragraphs:

It is now the 29th day of January, 1806, and from the great quantity of rain that has fallen and the low situation of the country, it is almost everywhere in a flood of water.

Every day that I travel I have to swim through creeks or swamps, and I am wet from my head to my feet, and some days from morning till night I am dripping with water.

I tie all my plunder fast on my horse, and take him by the bridle and swim sometimes a hundred yards and sometimes further. My horse's legs are now skinned and rough to his hock joints, and I have rheumatism in all my joints.¹³

An Advanced Scout

It may be that few if any of the early Methodist circuit riders grappled with more formidable difficulties and discouragements than Elisha W. Bowman and others encountered in the first attempts to establish Methodism in New Orleans and elsewhere in Louisiana. Bowman's letter cited above clearly shows that he felt he had failed in his mission, particularly in his effort to plant Methodism in New Orleans. But even in Bowman's time some people in New Orleans believed that sooner or later the Methodists would establish their church in that city. It is claimed that a resident of New Orleans who was hostile to the Methodists said, "Mr. Bowman was the first Methodist preacher to come here, and since he met with so little encouragement, none will ever succeed him." A lawyer who knew the Methodists better replied, "You need express no such satisfaction at the sudden departure of Mr. Bowman. The Methodists have reconnoitered this city by an advanced scout, and now they will never give it up as long as their itinerants can get a cowhide for a bed to sleep on, and sweet potatoes to eat." The lawyer was right. "By patient continuance in well-doing, under the special favor of God, they [the Methodists] have long since taken rank with the first Protestant denominations in the city." ¹⁴

Episcopalian Penetration

While Elisha Bowman was engaged in his unsuccessful effort to get a hearing as a Methodist preacher in New Orleans, a group of Protestant settlers in the city met to consider organizing a congregation and calling a pastor. The question of which denomination with which to affiliate was put to a vote; 45 preferred the Episcopal Church and 7 the Presbyterian, while only one voted for the Methodist Church. Also, the group decided that when and if an Episcopal house of worship was built it would be called Christ Church. A call

¹³ Ibid.
¹⁴ Ibid., p. 148.
was extended to Philander Chase, a young Episcopal priest who had been reared a Congregationalist, and he came down from New York to be the first Episcopal clergymen to serve in New Orleans.

The Episcopal congregation met first in the *cabildo* (town hall), then in the United States court room, and later in a house which had been previously occupied by the post commandant. Eventually the group moved to a room over Paulding’s jewelry store on Decatur Street, which was known as the Long Room and which also was used frequently over a period of ten years by itinerant Baptist preachers who came to New Orleans.

Though nearly all of the professing Protestants in New Orleans became Episcopalians at the outset, the congregation continually experienced difficulty in collecting enough money to meet current needs, to say nothing of realizing its hope of building a new church edifice. The pastor’s salary was often months in arrears. The vestry even talked of suing persons who had made pledges to the church and did not pay them. In 1810 the vestry finally resorted to a lottery in an effort to raise enough money to build a church. The lottery was to be carried out in accordance with the rules set by the territorial government to make sure that it was conducted honestly. But even the lottery failed to bring in the money.¹⁵ Discouraged, Philander Chase resigned in March, 1811, and went back north. Chase said that his two sons had been left with their uncle in Vermont for six years, that New Orleans, a city of vice and death, was no place for their adolescent years, and that the time had come for him to return to them and see to their education and welfare.

In April, 1812, Louisiana was admitted into the Union as the eighteenth state.

*Methodism Returns*

Several Methodist preachers visited New Orleans briefly after 1804, but none was officially appointed to the city until 1812 when Miles Harper came. Unfortunately no record of Harper’s labors has been found. The next year Lewis Hobbs, often called the “Weeping Prophet,” served in New Orleans. He was suffering from tuberculosis at the time and felt certain that he would not live long, declaring that he “trembled on the brink of the grave.” He died September 4, 1814, after returning to his native Georgia.¹⁶ Nine of Hobbs’ letters have been preserved, and they show that though he met opposition he managed to rent a room in which he could hold regular preaching services. In a letter to his good friend, William Winans of Mississippi, he said:

¹⁶ *Minutes of the Annual Conferences*, 1815.
I feel like a dry branch cut off and thrown into this place to be burnt with the fire of persecution... The Mayor and Corporation of the town forbid my preaching at 7 o'clock because the negroes would come. I told them I did not tell the negroes to come and it was not my business to drive them away—and after they found they could not do anything with me, they told me I might preach. I have sold my horse, and I have rented a room to preach in at fifteen dollars per month, and I am here with little money and many enemies.17

During Hobbs' time in New Orleans apparently he stayed in the home of Jacob Knobb, who had a wife and several children. The Knobb home was a two-story brick house on Bienville between Chartres and Royal streets. The Knobb family was very considerate of and kind to the early Methodist preachers in New Orleans. At the end of the year Hobbs reported to the Annual Conference that the Methodist society in New Orleans had six white and twenty colored members.

William Winans

In 1813, William Winans was appointed to New Orleans. He asked for permission to hold Methodist services in the cabildo and was refused. A resourceful man, he then started a school and on Sunday he used the school quarters for religious services. Since the Episcopal congregation was without a pastor, Philander Chase having departed two years earlier, the members began attending Winans' services. The Episcopalians liked Winans, and it is claimed that they—

decided to do a little proselytizing. They were spurred in this determination by the revival of interest in building a church... At a vestry meeting on March 27, 1814, Mr. Alfred Hennen, a young lawyer and Mr. J. W. Smith were authorized to ask Mr. Winans to preach regularly to the Christ Church congregation and to find a suitable place for services.

The Methodist missionary gladly accepted. Miraculously, the Cabildo, which had been refused to Winans, the Methodist, was made available to Winans, the pastor of Christ's Church. But Mr. Winans was to be bitterly disappointed. He had been preaching only a few weeks when another clergyman appeared, Dr. James F. Hull of Georgia who had been a licentiate of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland... The Irish newcomer made friends quickly... Soon he knew most of the influential English-speaking citizens, including of course, the vestrymen of Christ's Church. Which of them asked Hull to speak some Sunday at the Government House, we do not know; but asked he was, and his acceptance was predestined to be Mr. Winans’ undoing.18

Hull, “resplendent in a ruffled shirt and black gloves,” was asked to speak to the Episcopalian group on June 11, 1814, and he completely won them. The next day the vestry met and decided to invite Hull to be their preacher beginning January 1, 1815, the date of the expiration of Winans’ contract with them.

Despite his experience with the Episcopalians, Winans’ work in

17 Harper, op. cit., p. 38.
18 Carter, op. cit., p. 18.
New Orleans was not completely frustrated; some ten years later he had a part in the erection of the first Methodist church in the city.

Under Hull’s leadership, the Episcopalians were able to realize their goal of a church edifice in 1816. The city offered the congregation a site on the southwest corner of Canal and Bourbon streets, and at a cost of $3,000 the group bought a lot alongside the church for a rectory. The church, octagonal in shape and about 60 feet in diameter, was constructed of dark brick and was surmounted by a cupola.

The Methodists Persevere

In 1819, John Menefee was appointed to New Orleans, “but owing to a dreadful epidemic (yellow fever) the Society became almost completely disorganized.” Then Ebenezer Brown was sent as a Methodist missionary in 1820; he came to New Orleans “with a supply of Bibles and Testaments in French and Spanish, supplied by the American Bible Society.” The report of the Missionary Society in the Methodist Magazine for 1821 says:

One missionary has been sent from New York Conference with instructions, if possible, to preach to the French inhabitants of Louisiana; but by information received from him it appears he has not yet had any access to the French; but is preaching to large and attentive congregations of the English inhabitants of New Orleans. . . .”

Finally in December, 1823, Benjamin M. Drake was sent to New Orleans and during his pastorate the Methodists succeeded in building a church. Judge McGehee of Woodville, Mississippi, and William Winans assisted Drake in buying a lot for $2,000, one-half the cost being assumed by McGehee with the balance to be paid in twelve months.

The title to the lot was drawn in McGehee’s name, with his legal guarantee to transfer the property to a board of trustees whenever he should be reimbursed. To this day, the corporate name of the original Methodist congregation of New Orleans is “McGehee Church,” though successively known as Poydras Street Church, Carondelet Street Church, and First Methodist Church. An unsigned letter, which may have been written by Drake, says that the Methodist congregation of New Orleans, consisting of between twenty and thirty white and about sixty colored people, had gotten up a subscription and purchased a lot of ground, to put up a frame building 36 x 45 feet in the American part of the city. The congregation may have taken an option on a lot and the option may have figured in the purchase made possible by McGehee’s generosity. At any rate we find the following statement about the first Methodist church to be built in New Orleans:

Some years ago the site of the building was located. Mr. Grady Price, attorney, while making an abstract, came across the record of purchase of property by the early Methodists, and later with his assistance, the deed was found in the records at the Civil Court Building in New Orleans.

The lot measured 60 x 120 feet, fronting on Gravier Street, between Carondelet and Baronne, near the entrance of the present Richards Building. The church was “a small building, 36 x 48, weatherboarded without and plastered within, with a gallery for blacks.” It was erected at a cost of $1,750, the amount being paid in installments as the work progressed.

Catahoula

Meanwhile in another part of Louisiana, Methodism had pushed the door open, but not without difficulty. Circuit riders had been constantly trying to crack the hard shell of spiritual lethargy. They covered circuits that sometimes measured 500 miles around and traveled through swamps and bayous and over sparse prairies. They established a preaching appointment at Catahoula Lake in 1807.

Catahoula was an Indian name which meant sacrifice. Under the mighty live oaks standing on the high banks of the beautiful lake, the Indians gathered to offer up to the Great Spirit their sacrifices in propitiation of their sins. Beneath its pure waters they plunged their bodies to be cleansed of moral and physical impurities. Into its sacred waves they dipped their amulets and arrows to make them effective against their enemies. If, by chance, one of their number was drowned while performing the sacred rites, it was interpreted as a sign of the displeasure of the great Manitou, and was regarded as a punishment for some crime committed by the victim.

Among the white settlers at Catahoula Lake was a family named Bowie, whose son Jim later became famous for his bowie knife, and who subsequently fell at the Alamo in Texas. The Methodist preaching place at Catahoula was the Bowie home, according to Thomas Lasley, an early circuit rider. Lasley said that Mrs. Bowie was “of the excellent of the earth.” But her three sons, including Jim, were later found to have been engaged in smuggling slaves, which they boasted had netted them a clear profit of $65,000. Lasley said of Jim, “I am sorry that their son is the inventor of that dreadful weapon called the Bowie knife. With this young man I was then acquainted—at that time a civil young man.”

Axley’s Chapel

Later Captain Bowie quarreled with James Axley, a preacher who came to Catahoula. Bowie said Axley “had preached so much

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20 Harper, op. cit., p. 60.
21 Ibid., p. 10.
about hell that his (Bowie's) chimney had fallen down, and he would have him there no longer." The disagreement led to the building of the first Methodist church in Louisiana. At the time, Axley was in straitened circumstances. He had no money, his clothes were ragged, and he was discouraged because he had no preaching place. About that time some of Axley's friends gave him money to buy clothes. But instead of spending the money on himself, he bought flooring boards for a "meeting house!" He then went into the forest, felled some pine trees, and hewed them with his own hands. Borrowing a yoke of oxen, he hauled the logs to the site he had chosen for his church and persuaded some neighbors to raise the house. He covered the structure with shingles he himself had made. Also, he constructed a pulpit. Thus was the first Methodist church in Louisiana erected at Catahoula in 1808.

Axley gave notice that the meeting house was ready and that if the people would come together he would preach to them. At the first service 18 people joined the church. Among the new members was an old man who stole a piece of bacon the next week. Axley gave him a stern lecture, told him he was forewarned, and then crossed his name off the roll. One Dr. Green in the neighborhood encouraged the old man to sue the preacher for slander, but nothing came of it.

In view of the fact that Axley built the church at Catahoula almost single-handedly, it was appropriately called Axley's Chapel. The log chapel vanished long ago. While its exact location is not known today, records indicate that it stood along the Bushley Creek, a stream which enters the Washita River a short distance below Harrisonburg, Louisiana. It was probably near Catahoula Lake, with which the Bushley connects in time of high water.

Bayou Chicot

Legend has it that the little community of Bayou Chicot, Louisiana, which in the early 1800's was a thriving and prosperous plantation area, from the very first cordially welcomed the Methodist itinerants into their homes. The early circuit riders often mentioned going to homes in the community which they identified as "Bayou Schikow." Some believe that a Methodist church was built at Bayou Chicot before Axley's Chapel rose at Catahoula in 1808, but there is no documentary evidence to prove it.

The Civil War wiped out the prosperity of the "American" settlers at Bayou Chicot. Thereafter the population gradually dwindled. The small surviving community scarcely resembles the prosperous Bayou Chicot region which welcomed the Methodist circuit riders in ante-bellum days.
The Plaquemine Brulee Church

About sixteen miles southwest of Opelousas, Louisiana, at the little town of Branch, in the beautiful prairie section known as Plaquemine Brulee, or Burnt Persimmon, is the site of another early Methodist church. Built in 1820, it was described as follows:

About twenty-four by thirty-six feet, and on the Spanish model; roof largely projecting, and walls of wattle and plaster, white-washed on both sides; the outer side of which gave the church, at a distance, a very fine appearance.  

Although the exact location of the original structure is not known, it was built under the ministry of Daniel DeVinne, whose autobiography, "Printed for the Family" in 1883, supplies many of the details concerning this church. De Vinne seems to have been one of the first Methodist circuit riders who really tried to work among the French settlers. He says of himself:

While on the west side of the Mississippi I devoted a considerable time to the French—a gentleman in New Orleans plentifully supplying me with French tracts and Testaments. The preacher (DeVinne), sometimes, in the distribution of these religious gifts, made rather a grotesque appearance. His saddlebags, when filled, projected out almost horizontally both sides.

At first, the simple-hearted peasants received the Scriptures and tracts with all readiness. Sometimes I read for them, for which they were generally very thankful; and sometimes they offered me money, as was their custom to their own priest, which of course, I could not receive.

Some of these testaments may have been afterwards taken from them, but all of them were not; for the very attempt to do so awakened an inquiry in regard to what these Scriptures contained.

In all my travels, I was never ill treated by the native French of Louisiana. I never entered their dwellings—whether wet, hungry, or astray—without being kindly treated and even politely received, although I was generally known as the "American Priest."  

As indicated above, sixteen years earlier Elisha Bowman was not so cordially received by the French in Louisiana.

"A Pretty Little New England Brig"

One day two Methodist circuit riders were walking through the town of New Iberia, Louisiana, looking for a place to preach. Discouraged and exhausted because they had been denied every hall and building in town for a meeting place, they walked along the edge of the beautiful Bayou Teche, which slithered through the town. Suddenly they saw a "pretty little New England brig, trading in Yankee notions; sitting there on the Bayou Teche."

One of the preachers, Benjamin M. Drake, a descendant of the famous Sir Francis Drake, immediately became interested in the vessel. Going on board, he was delighted to find that the captain and the crew were Methodists. The welcome the preachers received

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22 Autobiography of Daniel DeVinne, 1883, manuscript copy.
23 Ibid.
prepared the way for the establishment of a Methodist congregation in New Iberia in 1823.

The Captain invited the preachers to hold a service on the ship in the evening, and immediately started out to invite the citizens to come to their service. . . . He soon returned, however, accompanied by a venerable looking man who was regarded as an unbeliever and opposer, who asked that the service be held on land, and offered the home of his son-in-law, Mr. French.

This opening, which seemed to result from the merest chance, provided a permanent preaching-place and home for the preachers.24

About this time Methodist churches began springing up in different places in the state of Louisiana. Prior to this period the preachers had held meetings in private homes, courthouses, and under shade trees. The congregations varied from three, to as many as one hundred. Sometimes in order to gather even a small congregation, preachers found it necessary to go around and announce their appointments. Since the preachers were not popular with the infidels and the Roman Catholics in Louisiana, they thereby submitted themselves to some contemptuous smiles and rebuffs.

The Circuit Riders

Methodism was finally established in Louisiana by the patient, persevering, even sacrificial, work of many young circuit riders. In their rounds they endured inconvenience and hardship. The circuit rider lived in the saddle and he carried his possessions in his saddlebags. On horseback or on foot, they crossed and re-crossed the endless tangle of bayous, swamps, and creeks which made up Louisiana. Some of them worked for less than thirty-four dollars per year. The people usually housed the circuit rider and fed his horse while he was on his rounds, but sometimes he had to pay for lodging for himself and feed for his horse.

In Louisiana the circuit riders had one problem which their brethren in other states may not have encountered often, namely, the necessity of trying to minister to people many if not most of whom were of races and cultural backgrounds different from his own. At times they must have felt as though they were trying to work in a foreign land.

The remains of some of the early circuit riders in Louisiana lie in unmarked graves, and the stories of their dedicated labors have not been preserved. An appropriate tribute for them would be the words of Francis Asbury, who said of his own self-denying ministry, "I have done this for souls. Had I done it for silver, there is not enough in the New World to pay me!" 25

24 Harper, op. cit., p. 19. (Original manuscript)