Bishop William McKendree addressed the Baltimore Conference Thursday, March 20, 1817 on the need for a proposed biography of the late Bishop Asbury. Prior to this occasion, the general superintendents (Bishops McKendree, George and Roberts) had conferred and were of the opinion that a committee of five men, whose duty would be to “collect, col[l]ate and select materials for the work,” should be appointed. Further, Bishop McKendree thought the superintendents and the committee ought to be allowed to employ a “compiler” to undertake the writing of the biography. The Baltimore Conference concurred in these recommendations; a committee of five with one member from the “private membership” was appointed and Samuel K. Jennings, President of Asbury College, was employed to compile a life of Bishop Asbury. A period of joint endeavor between compiler and committee ensued. But when a committee of seven men appointed by the Baltimore Conference of 1819 “to take time and diligently and carefully examine the manuscript” with a view to having it published, examined Dr. Jennings’ 269-page manuscript during the week of June 15, 1819, the committee unanimously agreed that the manuscript was not publishable. As a result of this action, Jennings took his manuscript and other materials and declined to continue work on the biography. By action of the General Conference of 1824 it was moved that Jennings be requested to turn over his manuscripts and source material to William Beauchamp and that the latter be given the responsibility of completing the biography.

The Reminiscences and the covering letter of George Roberts, given below, are both undated but internal evidence in the letter suggests that it was written sometime in 1820. It is probable, however, that the request for the Reminiscences was sent out prior to June 15, 1819 when Jennings and the committee were still jointly

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4 Ibid., 1820, p. 132.
6 George Roberts in his letter expresses his belief that the minutes of the Conference for "the last 26 years" ought to be published. Since the minutes up to the year 1794 had been published, it follows that George Roberts' letter was composed sometime in 1820. See the letter and footnote 59.
seeking source materials. Since the covering letter has no addressee and because Jennings is referred to in the third person, it is also probable that the *Reminiscences* was written at the behest of the committee of five or a member thereof. Similarly, John Wesley Bond’s *Anecdotes*, written in 1817, was undertaken at the request of Nelson Reed, a member of the committee. Other reminiscences of Asbury by Lewis Myers, however, were written at the request of, and sent to, Jennings.

Our knowledge of George Roberts is limited. Abel Stevens says of him, “He left among his papers not six lines respecting himself.” We do know that he was born near Easton, Maryland, May 3, 1766 and that he served as a local preacher in Talbot County, Maryland before he began to travel in 1790. For six years he was an active Methodist preacher in New England and subsequently served in Philadelphia and Baltimore. He located in 1806, having taken up the study of medicine. He remained an active Methodist in Baltimore until his death there November 27, 1827.

Bishop Asbury frequently mentions George Roberts in his *Journal* and at least 21 letters of Asbury to Roberts have been preserved. However, Asbury refers to George Roberts only once after the latter’s location in 1806. That reference is to the occasion on which they both preached the funeral of a mutual friend, Harry Dorsey Gough, June 5, 1808. By this date George Roberts was a practicing physician in Baltimore, as he was when he wrote his *Reminiscences* some ten or twelve years later.

The nineteen-page manuscript of the *Reminiscences* is made up of four fascicles of four pages each and a fifth fascicle of three pages, one page of which is George Roberts’ covering letter. The letter, depending upon the way in which the leaves of the fascicle were originally folded, could have been either the first page of a nineteen-page manuscript or the last. As preserved it is the last page of the manuscript.

The manuscript is untitled and the designation *Reminiscences* has been arbitrarily given it by the author of this article for convenience of reference. The *Reminiscences* was found in a collection of Bishop Matthew Simpson’s papers which were brought together by the late Clarence True Wilson, Wilson’s daughter, Mrs. Trueman Collins

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8 Lewis Myers’ papers, Drew University Library Manuscript.
10 *FAJL*, I, II and III, passim.
11 *FAJL*, II, p. 570.
12 Clarence True Wilson was born in Milton, Delaware, August 24, 1872. He was ordained in the Wilmington Conference and served churches in that conference and across the United States. Wilson was instrumental in establishing the temperance movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church. He died in Portland, Oregon, February 16, 1939.
of Portland, Oregon, has turned part of this valuable collection over to the Drew University Library for study and preservation, and it is there that the Reminiscences of George Roberts may be found.

The text of the Reminiscences and the covering letter are given in full below. Corrections and emendations in the text are clearly noted.

Text of George Roberts’ Reminiscences

I Parentage, youth and education

He informed me that his mother was left a widow when he was very young but whether it was before or after this period that he came acquainted with the Methodist I cannot [be] certain. I am inclined to believe that they were in slender circumstances from his sending her relief when ever he had it in his power. Of the magnitude of his family I never heard him say but I presume it was small for I never heard him speak of any but his mother. He was quite a youth when he embraced religion and he often expressed his gratitude to God for calling him at so early a period to the knowledge of the truth. As the circumstances of his family were slender, his education in the ordinary way I presume was very limited and that in the most of his literary acquirements he was self taught. He understood the Hebrew, Greek and Latin languages. When I was with him he would frequently employ himself in reading the Scriptures in the original tongues while I would follow him in the English Bible.

II His entering into the work of the ministry

I have no correct knowledge of this period but he was admitted in to the itinerant connection at the Conference of 1767. As for the rest—the material you have may make up the deficiency. At the Conference of 1771 he with Mr. Robert Wright was appointed to

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13 Roberts’ memory is faulty here. Joseph Asbury, the father of Francis Asbury, did not die until 1798 at which time his son was 53 years of age and had been acquainted with the Methodists for more than 35 years. See Ezra Squire Tipple, Francis Asbury, the Prophet of the Long Road (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1916), pp. 39-43, and FAL, I, pp. 720 ff.; II, p. 163 (July 9, 1798).

14 Joseph Asbury (1715?-1798) and Elizabeth Rogers Asbury (1715?-1801) had two children, Sarah Asbury baptized May 3, 1743 and buried May 28, 1748, and Francis Asbury, born August 21, 1745 and died March 31, 1816. See FAL, I, pp. 3, 720 ff.

15 Asbury notes that he was “awakened before I was fourteen years of age.” See FAL, I, p. 721.

16 Asbury was largely self-taught. He received only about seven years of formal schooling. See FAL, I, pp. 720 ff.

17 After the word “but” a second hand has crossed the word “from” and added the following words, “he was admitted into the itinerant connection at the Conference of 1767. As for the rest”


19 After the word “have” the words “you may not need any assistance” have been crossed out and the words “may make up the deficiency” have been added by a second hand.

20 Original hand has “Mr. R. Wright.” Second hand has added to the letter R, “obert.” Minutes of the Methodist Conference, xxvii, Bristol, Tuesday, August 6, 1771 (Vol. I, pp. 98 f) indicate that Richard Wright came to America with Francis Asbury.
come over to this country—Mr. Wright did not stay long with him to strengthen his hands—He returned and quit the itinerant connection. 21

III State of Religion in America

Of this I can add nothing to your stock of knowledge—You know the different sects which were in this country and the characters of each as well as the state of religion among them. You have also a history of the rise of Methodism here 22 if you have not I will take the liberty to refer you to the bound Minutes of Conference and to Drew's Life of Doctor Coke, Chapter IV, V, etc. 23

IV His conduct during the Revolutionary Wars etc.

If the Gospel meets with opposition in a time of peace from the enemies of 24 evangelical religion it is natural to expect that it will be much greater in a time of war when the worst passions are inflamed and reason and reflection drowned by their influence. When the nature of this war is taken into the calculation and we consider the national character of the missionaries we shall not be surprised at the difficulties they had to encounter, but because that they did not suffer more than they did. The difficulties of the infant mission accumulated and its existence like to have been destroyed by its early head and the mistaken zeal of the greater part of the first agents employed in it. 25 That great man of God, Mr. Wesley, from the best of motives wrote and published his thoughts on the American war in which he took the side of government and warmly reprobated the conduct of all who were found in rebellion against the parent state. 26 The missionaries in their zeal to serve humanity caught and echoed 27 his sentiments. Mr. Asbury stood alone and was silent on this subject. His English brethren had to fly from the country and it was with difficulty they escaped the vengeance of the enraged Americans. The worst construction was put upon their designs. They were viewed as British spies and looked upon as the worst of enemies to

21 Richard Wright was received into the traveling ministry by John Wesley in 1770. He traveled one year and in 1771 was sent as a missionary with Francis Asbury to America. He preached in Pennsylvania, New York, Delaware, and Maryland. He returned to England in 1774. See FAJL, I, p. 4n.

22 This is probably a reference to Jesse Lee, A Short History of the Methodists in the United States, Baltimore: 1810.


24 The word "to" has been crossed out and the word "of" written in a second hand above it.

25 This may be a reference to Thomas Rankin, Wesley's General Assistant in America, against whom a certain amount of antagonism had been generated amongst Methodist preachers in America, including Asbury. This also may be a reference to men like Martin Rodda whose strong advocacy of Tory principles alienated him from preachers and people alike. See Emory Stevens Bucke, et al., The History of American Methodism, in three volumes. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), Vol. I, pp. 113 f., 132-136, 141.

26 Ibid., pp. 162-164.

27 The word "blessed" has been crossed out and the word "echoed" inserted by a second hand.
the freedom of this country and although Mr. Asbury never meddled with politics or either directly or indirectly took any side in the contrivanny he was associated with those that did and his being an Englishman was enough to involve him in the same sin—and for more than a year he had to hide himself from the enraged Americans. He did not think it his duty to fly from the country. He knew that if he fell a victim to popular rage he should fall innocent and by retiring for the present the propitious time might come when the door would open again for him to come forth in the name of the Lord. The Lord raised up for him a fast friend and protector in Mr. White of Delaware in whose house he found an asylum during the storm. Mr. White was a magistrate and a gentleman of influence and he did everything to make his life comfortable. Here he was hid like the prophet of Israel and he poured out his soul to God for the prosperity of Zion, and the peace of the world—and looked with solicitude for the time when he could go forth unrestrained and offer once more salvation upon the whole of the Gospel.

V His taking charge of the mission and the difficulties he had to contend with in keeping the societies together—

Altho[ugh] the rest of the English missionaries had fled home and he was left alone by them—he was not left comfortless for in the short time that the Gospel had been preached by the Methodists the Lord had so signally owned their labors that there were thirty two preachers raised up and eight thousand five hundred & seventy seven who had manifested a desire to flee from the wrath to come and be saved from their sins. It is true he had but little intercourse with them but he had it for his consolation that the sheep of Christ was not left without a shepherd to guide, feed and comfort them. The clergy of the established church in the colonies

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28 End of fascicle No. 1.
29 After the word “and” the words “was an” have been crossed out and the words “his being an’ added by a second hand.
30 After the word “Englishman” the word “this” has been crossed out.
31 A second hand has crossed out the word “innocently” and substituted the word “innocent.”
32 After the word “might” the words “open the door” have been crossed out and the words “come when the door would open [again]” have been added.
33 Thomas White (1730-1795) was a magistrate who lived near Whitesburg in Kent County, Delaware. Here, amid a family who early became Methodists, Asbury found sanctuary from persecution November 9, 1778 until April 20, 1780. See E. C. Hallman The Garden of Methodism, Peninsula Annual Conference, n.d.) p. 123.
34 After the word “and” the words “there was nothing left undone” are crossed out and the words “he did everything” have been added by a second hand.
35 After the word “here” the words “he was hid like the prophet of Israel and” have been inserted.
36 After the word “Zion” the words “and the peace of the world” have been inserted.
37 Word uncertain. Word is probably “hole” to be read “whole.”
38 The statistics given are for the year 1779. See Minutes of the Methodist Conferences. Place of publication and date not given.
being supported by [the] government and the greater part of them having to fly from the country when the war broke out because they were strenuously opposed to the Revolution, their flocks were left alone and the churches abandoned to the beasts of the field. The more serious and religious were deprived of the ordinances of the Gospel for the Methodist societies in America as well as in England did not associate themselves together as an organised church where the ordinances of the Gospel are regularly administered but for the purpose only of helping each other to work out their salvation. In this state of privation many of them became uneasy and pressed their fathers in Christ to give them relief. Some of the preachers listened to them and seeing no probability of their being authorised in any other way ordained each other for that purpose. When Mr. Asbury heard of it he was much distressed and as soon as the state of things would permit him to move set his face against the proceedings and laboured to bring those brethren back to what he conceived to be their duty for the great interests of the work in God in which they all were engaged. (See his Journal)

VI His qualifications etc.

Those who were near enough to read the character of this servant of God could not but see that his sole aim in preaching was to get at the hearts of his hearers. He did not temporize. He sought to please but to their edification and in doing this he laboured to manifest himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. It made no difference to him whether he was delivering the Word of the Lord to the rich or to the poor to the master or to the servant to a polite audience in a populous city or to a promiscuous congregation in the wilderness he viewed all alike fallen from God all alike exposed to the just indignation of heaven who must repent or perish and who must be born again or never enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The preachers raised up by the great head of the church through the instrumentality of the Methodists in this country were plain men whose literary opportunities in general had been few—but they were men of sound understandings who were endowed with the spirit of inquiry and had read their Bibles with attention and much prayer to God. They laboured to improve themselves more and more for their great work by all the means in their power. This, Mr. Asbury had no objection to, when properly directed and kept within due bounds—but his fears were awakened lest they should suffer loss in the life of the Gospel and he set himself to guard against it by his

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39 This refers to the action of the conference held at Broken Back Church in Fluvana, Virginia, May 18, 1779.
own example and precept. At a Conference held in the city of New York he heard a young man preach for whom his fears were much alarmed in this respect. The next day he took occasion to warn the preachers in a sermon he preached to the Conference against splitting upon this rock. "I am afraid" said he "that some of you will Methodise yourselves dead"—and raising his voice still higher—"I am afraid that some of you will Methodise yourselves damned," fetching a stamp on the floor of the pulpit that startled the whole assembly. He knew that he was beloved by the preachers as a father is by his children and that his own example in every thing would have a greater or less influence upon them he was careful therefore to set them such an one even in his dress as they might safely follow. The color of his outward garments when he was consulted was generally a light blue or parson's gray—He would often say when speaking on that subject, "I wonder how an ambas[s]idor of Jesus Christ can choose black for the color of his garment when there is no analogy between that color and the glad tidings of great joy which he is commanded to proclaim to a lost world." He sometimes would indulge himself at the expense of a preacher where he was not personally known—He sometimes would indulge himself at the expense of a preacher where he was not personally known—He sometimes would indulge himself at the expense of a preacher where he was not personally known—He sometimes would indulge himself at the expense of a preacher where he was not personally known—He sometimes would indulge himself at the expense of a preacher where he was not personally known—He sometimes would indulge himself at the expense of a preacher where he was not personally known—He sometimes would indulge himself at the expense of a preacher where he was not personally known—He sometimes would indulge himself at the expense of a preacher where he was not personally known—He sometimes would indulge himself at the expense of a preacher where he was not personally known—He sometimes would indulge himself at the expense of a preacher where he was not personally known—He sometimes would 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but among savages in the wilderness. At one time in visiting Kentucky the traveler had to lodge three nights in the wilderness where he was exposed to the merciless Indians who often massacred and scalped the helpless traveler and one if no more of our preachers fell by their barbarous hands. In the year of seventeen hundred and ninety nine or the year following, I am not certain which, a company of men and women and perhaps children to the number of thirty or upwards were passing through the wilderness. On the second night one of the women dreamed that the Indians fell on them and murdered all but herself and her husband. She awoke and told her husband her dream. He roused up the company who were all asleep. They laughed that he should be disturbed by a woman's dream and they all being tired fell to sleep again when she dreamed the same dream the second time and told it to her husband. He waked the company who were much offended at it. They lay down and she dreamed it the third time when she had only time to rouse up her husband before the savages fell upon them and literally fulfilled her dream. This happened only two or three weeks before Mr. Asbury passed the same route to attend the Kentucky Conference. But in all his perils he felt that the Lord was his banner and that the broadshield of His power protected him. He committed the keeping of his body and soul unto Him as unto a faithful Creator.

Those who will cast an eye on a map of these United States and recollect that he traveled in various directions through them from north to south and from east to west annually attending all the conferences, that he kept up a regular correspondence with all the presiding elders, many of the circuit and stationed preachers, beside many private friends both in Europe and America, that he had appointements and preached in his tour wherever a congregation could be collected, must see that his time was not proportioned to the vast work that lay upon him. It was this with other motives that first led to that order of ministers denominated presiding elders. As the work of the Lord extended itself and the preachers multiplied and he not having time to superintend every part of the work as often as his enlarged heart wished and as many of the preachers were young in years and experience he selected such as he judged qualified to supply his lack of service and appointed them to superintend each a number of circuits called districts and made it their duty to visit every circuit once in three months or four times a year (see their duties defined in the Discipline). But this was not intended to lessen his own labours but to supply what was impos[s]i-

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44 Roberts' remembrance is incorrect. The Indian massacre of 24 persons on the Wilderness Road in Kentucky which was anticipated three times in three dreams by a woman of the company, occurred October 3, 1763. This event is recorded by Asbury in his *Journal* under the date of May 9, 1790 at which time he was on his way to conference near Lexington, Kentucky. See *FAJL*, I, pp. 635-639.

45 End of fascicle No. 3.

46 Word uncertain.
ble for one man to perform. In every case he could say I have labored more abundantly than you all—He would frequently be on horseback at sunrise travel fifteen or twenty miles to breakfast and not put up till nine and ten o’clock at night—He would oftten say to the preachers when complaining of their hardships, “You must have a stomach for every man’s table and a back for every man’s bed—that the cause was His who said to His disciples when He was with them in the flesh, The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head.”

VII His deadness to the world and trust in the providence of God

Perhaps there has been but few brighter examples of that Gospel precept Let not your affections upon the earth thus he was. I have often heard him say that when he volunteered himself to come over to this country to preach the Gospel he turned his back upon the world, that the last thing he consented to leave to follow Christ to the new world and which lay nearer his heart than every thing beside was his aged mother. But said he, “O that precious promise, He that leaveth father or mother for my sake and the Gospel.” How often has God verified [it] to me in this work and I am looking for its full accomplishment in the world to come. He would often break out and sing “I have no babes to hold me here, but children more securely dear, for mine, I humbly claim” and “There is a land of pleasure where saints immortal reign” which were favorite pieces of poetry with him. I sometimes thought that he carried his deadness to the world too far and in trusting to the care of divine providence over him was rather presumtious in slighting the ordinary means, by a kind of negligence all most peculiar to himself and so much so sometimes that he must have real[y] suffered in all human probability if it had not been for the provident care of his friends who knew him well. But even their care of him, he would set down to the account of divine providence. It is common for the most of men from a sense of duty and common prudence to look a head so far at least as to use the means in their power to provide for contingencies but to me he appeared not even to do that but would often say when others were inquiring, “What shall I eat or what shall I drink?”—“Take no thought for tomorrow let tomorrow take thought for its self.” “Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof.”

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49 The word “the” has been omitted by the editor.
60 Mark 10:29.
53 An undetermined word has been crossed out after the word “he.”
54 Word uncertain. Word resembles “sliting”; perhaps it should be read “slighting.”
55 Matt. 6:31, 34.
When his friends thought he stood in need of clothes and supplied him he would put them on and leave those he had pulled off behind saying to them, "Give these to the first poor preacher who has on a worse suit or to some poor child of God who stands more in need of them." When he took a new tour he did not in common make any calculation of the probability of his expenses or whether he had sufficient to supply his wants. In the summer of eighteen hundred and five he took a tour to Boston from the city of New York and crossing over the state of Vermont in the northern part of the state of New York near the lakes and returning by the Mohawk and the North Rivers down to the White Plains where Conference was held that year in the consequence of the yellow fever raging in the city where it was to have been held. The morning that he set out the trustees of the church called on him at the parsonage to know if he did not stand in need of money for his journey, reminding him that from the few friends he would find in his route to call upon he would be under the necessity of making a friend of the mammon of unrighteousness. He said that he stood in need of nothing. When one of them urged him to let them know how much he had, he drew from his pocket his purse and threw it on the table and seemingly displeased that they gave themselves so much concern about him said, "There is all that I have—it is enough—and to spare." When they turned it out and counted it, it did not amount to three dollars.

When he met with a preacher in want, he would divide with him what little he had either in clothes or money, saying with a smile, "Never mind brother, God will provide.—Our poverty is to wean us from this world and to test our faith in the providence of God and the promises of the Gospel." “Remember he that feeds the young ravens that have neither storehouse nor barn and who numbers the hairs of our head will take care of his faithful servants.” “Our light afflictions which are but for a moment will work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory—

GEORGE ROBERTS’ COVERING LETTER

Dr. Jennings will see that I have given my view of the late Bishop Asbury interspersed with some facts that he may or may not find among his other papers, in writing his Biography. If it is suitably arranged it will be important to the connection as it will contain a complete history of the rise and progress of Methodism in this country. The minutes of the several conferences will afford you ample means. The book commit[ed] ought to print them. They did

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56 End of fascicle No. 4.  
58 Dr. Samuel K. Jennings, President of Asbury College, who was employed by the Baltimore Conference to write a Life of Bishop Asbury.
send out an edition of them up to 1794 and it is high time that they should publish them for the last 26 years. You will find also some help in the life of Doctor Coke by Drew. These things may have entered in to your plan but I do not think it amiss to mention them.

I am very respectfully yours

G[eorge] R[oberts]

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59 Minutes of the Methodist Conferences 1773 to 1794. Place of publication and date not given. This sentence indicates that this letter was written sometime in the year 1820.

60 Samuel Drew, op. cit.

61 This letter signed G.R. is one page 3 of fascicle No. 5. The letter does not have a date, address, or salutation.