

HISTORIC LOCATIONS RECENTLY RECOGNIZED

The 1970 Special Session of the General Conference officially designated Whitaker's Chapel as the fifteenth National Historic United Methodist Shrine, and named three National Historic United Methodist Landmarks, the first to be recognized in this category. The three are: Methodist Hospital of Brooklyn, McMahan's Chapel, and Lovely Lane Chapel site.

Following are brief articles on three of these historic places. In view of the fact that Lovely Lane is known quite well throughout the church and since articles have appeared previously dealing with the Chapel and the Christmas Conference, we have made no effort to include a manuscript on Lovely Lane at this point.—Editor.

WHITAKER'S CHAPEL

by William K. Quick

To the 1970 General Conference of the United Methodist Church came this recommendation from the Commission on Archives and History:

Because the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church was organized in Whitaker's Chapel, because it was the first Methodist Protestant conference of any kind, even antedating the organization of the Methodist Protestant General Conference, because the present building has pilgrimage appeal, and because Whitaker's Chapel was long regarded as the main historical shrine of one of the branches of American Methodism which united in 1939 to form The Methodist Church, it is recommended for designation as the fifteenth Historical Shrine of The United Methodist Church.¹

On April 24th delegates in St. Louis's Kiel Auditorium approved the proposal.²

Whitaker's Chapel, located in the agricultural heartland of coastal plain North Carolina, became the first shrine so designated by the United Methodist Church. The Chapel is unique among the fifteen national historic shrines as the only one with a distinctive Methodist Protestant connection.

A recognition service formally noting the designation is set for October 11, 1970. The North Carolina Conference Commission on Archives and History has planned a commemorative service with John H. Ness, Jr. as the principal speaker.

The Chapel, six miles east of Enfield, North Carolina, dates from 1740 as an Anglican place of worship built by Richard Whitaker. The original meetinghouse was a log structure and stood across the road

¹ From "Recommendation For Designation as a Historical Shrine" Original Document, Association of Methodist Historical Societies. Bishop T. Otto Nall, President; Albea Godbold, Executive Secretary.

² *The Daily Christian Advocate*, General Conference of the United Methodist Church, April 25, 1970, p. 279.

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³ *The Rocky*
June 20, 1965,
⁴ L. C. Rude
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⁶ *Ibid.* (see
⁷ *Ibid.*, I, p.

from the present building. It was named for the Whitaker family who migrated from Tidewater, Virginia, to Halifax County, North Carolina, in the 18th century. Among the distinguished ancestors of the Whitakers was the Rev. Alexander Whitaker, who baptized the Indian princess, Pocahontas, and who was known as "the apostle of Virginia". His father, the Rev. William Whitaker (1548-1595), was master of St. John's College, Cambridge.³ The Chapel served the Anglicans until the revolt of the colonists in 1776. With the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, many Anglican churches were abandoned, their people, in fact, unchurched, and few of their clergymen remained in the colonies. Even the Methodist preachers, followers of the Tory, John Wesley, were suspect, including those who had been born in America. Essentially as American as could be, they had been raised from among their peers and trained on the colonial scene. Except for Asbury, the eight official Methodist missionaries, who had been sent from England by Wesley, had returned by 1778 due to the colonial rebellion.⁴ Many of the Anglican churches, without clergy, ceased to function as parish churches, and the Methodists, with no place to assemble, simply appropriated the Anglican buildings.

Thus, Whitaker's Chapel ceased to be Anglican and became Methodist.

Bishop Francis Asbury made the first of three visits to Whitaker's Chapel on Tuesday, March 21, 1786, during his second episcopal journey into the South. He had been to colonial Hillsborough and had met a cool reception. He vowed not to visit Orange County again until a Society was formed and conditions changed. He wrote eleven days later: "I came to Whitaker's Chapel, near Fishing Creek, where I spoke, with but little consolation to myself, to about seventy souls. I feel my body unwell; but my soul is stayed in cheerful dependence upon God."⁵

Within a decade Whitaker's had become a notable preaching place, served by John Dickens during his appointment to the Bertie Circuit in Halifax County. It is interesting that during the week of his first visit to Whitaker's, Asbury and Dickens spent considerable time together. On this initial visit he read for the first time the manuscript of the *Form of Discipline* which had been prepared by Dickens, destined to become the first book agent.⁶

Three years later Asbury preached at Whitaker's Chapel, and the situation had changed considerably. He wrote in his *Journal* for January 17-18, 1789: "We had a profitable time; I found God had been working, and that many souls had been awakened."⁷

³ *The Rocky Mount, N. C. Sunday Telegram*, Article by Dr. Ralph H. Rives, June 20, 1965, p. B1.

⁴ L. C. Rudolph, *Francis Asbury* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966) p. 33.

⁵ *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury* (JLFA), edited by Elmer T. Clark, J. Manning Potts and Jacob S. Payton (Nashville: Abingdon, 1958) Vol. I, p. 510.

⁶ *Ibid.*, (see footnote)

⁷ *Ibid.*, I, p. 590.

Weak and in pain, Asbury made his final visit to Whitaker's on Friday, March 2, 1804. He preached on Revelation 2:10: "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; you shall have tribulations ten days: be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." He wrote: "I ordained Henry Bradford, Benjamin Nevell and William Lindsay deacons; it was very cold." From the Chapel he rode twenty miles across the Roanoke River and lodged at Richard Whitaker's, who was ordained a deacon the next day at Rehoboth Chapel.⁸

Richard Whitaker was one of the twenty-six official delegates who met in December, 1828, at Whitaker's Chapel for the historic break-away conference.

Events of the preceding twenty years precipitated this first major schism of American Methodism. In 1808 the General Conference became a delegated conference "with a representation of one to every five traveling preachers."⁹ To allow for all the travelling preachers to vote on certain important matters of legislation, Restrictive Rules were adopted.

A proviso was added that these restrictions could not be altered except "by joint commendation of all the annual conferences and a majority of two-thirds of the General Conference succeeding."¹⁰ Thus the legislative powers of the General Conference were accordingly limited. It locked in the stranglehold the clergy had on the church, and for all practical purposes shut out the laymen in decision-making.

By the close of the 1820 General Conference, it became apparent that the movement advocating representation of the laity in the Conferences was gaining momentum. Petitions on behalf of lay representation, a modification of the office of Presiding Elder, and the abolition of the episcopacy were presented to the 1824 General Conference and were rejected by strong majorities.¹¹

The crisis over lay representation led to a strong lay reform movement in Halifax County and northeastern North Carolina. The Roanoke District conference, meeting at Whitaker's Chapel in 1822, voted to circulate a letter which emphasized that the prerogatives assumed by the church hierarchy were "at variance with the refinement and liberality of the country and the age in which we live." That same conference in 1823 petitioned the 1824 General Conference for "a voice in making the laws by which we are to be governed."¹²

The General Conference of 1824 refused to consider memorials on

⁸ *Ibid.*, II, p. 426.

⁹ Walter McElreath, *Methodist Union in the Courts*, (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1946) p. 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹¹ A. B. Hyde, *The Story of Methodism*, (New York: M. W. Hagen Publishers, 1888), p. 517.

¹² Rives' Article, *op. cit.*

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the subject of lay representation and offended the discontented brethren.¹³

Many of the dissidents met in Baltimore in November, 1828 and formed a society of "Associate Methodist Reformers." A provisional organization, the Associate Methodist Churches (Societies), resulted, and committees to draft a Constitution and Discipline and compile a Hymn Book were appointed. They agreed the Convention would meet again in two years.

A month later Whitaker's Chapel was the scene of the organization of the North Carolina Annual Conference, the first of the thirty annual conferences of the Methodist Protestant Church. On December 19-20, 1828 nine ministers, five local preachers and twelve laymen met and decided that they would govern and be governed as they pleased.

Those present included clergymen: William Bellamy, Henry B. Bradford, James Hunter, William W. Hill, Miles Nash, Albritton Jones, Thomas Moore, William Price, and Eli B. Whitaker; local preachers: Israel Hutchins, Aquilla Norman, Ira Norman, Asa Steely and Thomas Steely. Lay delegates were William E. Bellamy, John F. Bellamy, David Barrow, Arthur Pittman, Exum Lewis, Richard Jones, Eli B. Whitaker, Jr., Wilson C. Whitaker, L. H. B. Whitaker, James C. Whitaker, Absalom B. Whitaker, and Richard H. Whitaker. Descendants of many of these men still live in the general area of Halifax, Nash, and Edgecombe counties.

At St. John Church in Baltimore the denomination formally came into being at a called session on November 2, 1830. Methodist Protestants "did away with the episcopacy and admitted lay representation in the conferences of the church."¹⁴

A distribution of power was spread among the General, Annual, and Quarterly conferences. Laymen, both male and female, were granted membership in quarterly conferences and in equal number with ministers in the annual and general conferences.

Whitaker's Chapel was one of several area Methodist Episcopal Churches which voted to go as an entire congregation into the new denomination. Five other sessions of the North Carolina Annual Conference met at Whitakers in 1830, 1833, 1842, 1845, and 1849.

After the 1828 conference the second Whitaker's Chapel—a frame but unceiled house—was moved about five hundred yards away, and in 1850 the third (and present) building was erected. In 1880 it was moved across the road to its present site.

It is a typically beautiful yet simple white frame chapel of the mid-19th century with dark green shutters. Doors enter from either side of the narthex thence into the nave, which has a unique semi-circular dome. The chancel area includes a curved communion rail

¹³ Ellwood K. Smith, "Background and Consequences of Methodist Union," *Methodist History* (Lake Junaluska: Assn. of Methodist Historical Societies, January 1964) p. 3.

¹⁴ McElreath, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

with table, pulpit, and clergy chairs—the latter located in a recessed portion of the chancel. The original Victorian wall bracket lamps and massive chandeliers are still used. The oil-burning lamps have been converted to electricity. On either side of the chancel at the rear are two Sunday School rooms. A walnut pump organ (c. 1890) was retained in the nave, although a recently acquired electronic organ is used for the worship services.

The membership of the Chapel had dwindled to 36 by the mid-forties and in 1947 worship services were discontinued. An annual contribution to conference benevolences is recorded in the *Conference Journal* through 1958. In 1962 the *Journal* stopped listing Whitaker's among the churches of the Rocky Mount district. The last report noted 33 remaining members.¹⁵ Her demise as a local church was recorded. The old building, already in ill repair, was brutally assaulted by the weather, neglect and now-total abandonment. Only the cemetery to the rear, dating from 1850, was maintained.

In the fall of 1964, while serving the St. James Methodist Church in Greenville, the writer and Dr. Ralph H. Rives, professor at East Carolina University and an active Methodist layman, visited J. Waldo Whitaker, a descendent of the Chapel's founder. We proposed a commemorative service for December, 1964 to be sponsored by the North Carolina Conference Historical Society. Expressing a keen interest in the service, he agreed to get the Chapel "in shape". Mrs. Lawrence Whitaker, who holds the deed to the property, also enthusiastically endorsed the idea.

On December 20, 1964—the 136th anniversary of the organization of the first annual conference of the Methodist Protestant Church—some 175 persons attended this service with Bishop Paul Neff Garber of the Raleigh Area as the principal speaker.

Interest was spontaneously rekindled and three worship services, sponsored by the Historical Society, were held in the next five months. Waldo Whitaker became especially eager to restore the Chapel his ancestors had founded some 225 years before. Through his generosity a faithful restoration took place in the spring of 1965. New sills and underpinning support the entire structure. Walls were plastered, wall-to-wall carpet installed and the antique pulpit chairs refurbished.

Broken window panes were replaced, and the edifice was completely painted. It was formally opened to the public on June 20, 1965, with the writer preaching the morning sermon. A Homecoming Service drew some 300 persons, and a historical marker was presented by the North Carolina Department of Archives and History. The legend reads:

WHITAKER'S CHAPEL, ORIGINALLY ANGLICAN, 1740;
LATER METHODIST. FIRST ANNUAL CONFERENCE
OF THE METHODIST PROTESTANT CHURCH IN U.S.

¹⁵ *Journal*, North Carolina Annual Conference, The Methodist Church, SeJ, 1961, p. 467.

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MET HERE, 1828. THIS IS THE THIRD BUILDING ON THIS SITE.

During the past five years, worship services have been conducted the third Sunday in each month with annual Homecoming observances and a Christmas Love Feast each December. A number of memorials have been presented and an unusual historical exhibit is on display in the narthex. A bronze marker denoting the December, 1828 conference has been dedicated.

Efforts continued through the Association of Methodist Historical Societies (and the successor Commission on Archives and History) to secure the designation as a national historic shrine. In July, 1969 a session of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Commission on Archives and History met at Whitaker's. A communion service, using the Methodist Protestant ritual, highlighted the worship shared by 150 people.

Though worthy of a pilgrimage, Whitaker's Chapel symbolizes best the persistence of a people for total participatory democracy in both church and state! Let the pilgrim never forget this!

METHODIST HOSPITAL OF BROOKLYN

by W. Bernard Grossman

Some say Methodist Hospital of Brooklyn began when Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan, which is depicted in the Great Seal of the Hospital. Others claim it started when John Wesley published *Primitive Physic* in 1748, "which ran through twenty-three editions during Wesley's lifetime."¹

The actual events leading to organizing and building this first Methodist hospital in the world is an inspiring study of progress against great odds. It was born in the mind of one minister in a time of distress and pastoral anxiety.

When James Monroe Buckley was pastor of First Methodist Episcopal Church in Stamford, Connecticut (1874-77), his organist met with an accident in New York City which necessitated the amputation of an arm. Having been struck by a runaway team, the organist laid on the ground for more than an hour before an ambulance came. A short time later he died, "in surroundings which were far from being Christian."² This seemed a terrible tragedy, and in the sadness of that hour, Dr. Buckley made a vow that someday, if possible, he would secure the erection of a Methodist hospital.

It was in 1880 that Dr. Buckley was elected Editor of *The Christian Advocate*, and he began immediately to fulfill his promise. He wrote a series of editorials on "Methodism and Charitable Institutions." The first is, perhaps, the most effective editorial ever to appear

¹ C. T. Winchester, *The Life of John Wesley* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 186.

² *Annual Report*, Methodist Hospital of Brooklyn, 1897.