We publish this quarter a DISCOVERY by Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, the distinguished Methodist Librarian and Assistant Professor of Church History at Drew University, Madison, New Jersey. I had inquired about any Thomas Morrell material in the possession of the Rose Memorial Library, and Dr. Rowe replied that Morrell’s Journal, which the library owns, was too extensive for DISCOVERY and the few letters in the possession of the library were a “very miscellaneous lot”.

Turning to another subject, Dr. Rowe wrote, “I have, however, come up with another document which may be the earliest course of study which we have ‘DISCOVERED’ so far. It is in Freeborn Garrettson’s hand and probably belongs to the early or middle 1820’s when he served on the examining committee of the New York Conference.

“I have added a brief introduction to the full text, which also points out another ‘DISCOVERY,’ that it was Nathan Bangs who authored the original resolution of 1816 recommending the bishops to establish the course of study. I have ‘DISCOVERED’ some other material on this same subject, including a highly significant ‘Philadelphia Plan’ of 1833 authored by Bishops Emory and Hedding.”

We hope to use this last DISCOVERY in a future issue of Methodist History. Dr. Rowe’s current DISCOVERIES follow:

NEW LIGHT ON EARLY METHODIST THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

by Kenneth E. Rowe

The success of Methodism in its early years seemed to preclude any necessity for formal theological education. The Christmas Conference of 1784 made no provision for the education of preachers, except for a recommendation that they maintain a habit of daily reading and study. For thirty years nothing was done to implement
this recommendation. Further, the statements which appeared in the early Disciplines concerning ministerial study were “ambiguous, if not contradictory.”¹

Read the most useful Books, and that regularly and constantly. Steadily spend all the Morning in this Employ, or at least five Hours in four and twenty.

On the other hand, it added:

Gaining knowledge is a good Thing, but saving Souls is a better... If you can do but one, let your Studies alone.²

In the light of these conflicting demands it is not surprising that by 1816 a General Conference committee could point out a “manifest defect among us... in regard to ministerial qualifications.”³ The tutorial system whereby young men were apprenticed to older men had not proved generally effective. The junior preachers often lacked even the rudiments of an elementary education and thus were ill-equipped to take up any program of reading and self study, whether by personal initiative or by suggestion or demand of the senior circuit preacher, the Presiding Elder, or the Bishop.

In order to prevent the continuation of a situation which threatened to “undermine” the itinerancy, the Committee on Ways and Means called for “the prompt and vigorous interference of [the 1816] General Conference.”⁴ The Committee, chaired by Nathan Bangs of New York, specifically recommended that the Bishops, or annual conference committees appointed by them, “point out a course of reading and study proper to be pursued by candidates for the ministry” and that the Presiding Elders “shall direct” candidates to those studies. Henceforth no candidate was to be “received into full connexion” in an annual conference unless he could give “satisfactory evidence” to an examining committee of his attention to this requirement.⁵ The intention was that the candidates might thus be better prepared to continue their studies in conjunction with the labors of an itinerant life as envisioned by the Discipline. The recommendation, which Bangs himself claimed

⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid., p. 151.
to have authored, "encountered great opposition," but was finally approved after several days of debate.\(^6\)

In the years following 1816 training of candidates continued to be irregular and spasmodic.\(^7\) Selection of titles, methods of examination, and the number of years of study varied among the conferences. As late as 1824 the General Conference Committee on the Itinerancy could still report that "in some instances . . . the young preachers have not been furnished with the course of study contemplated by the book of Discipline."\(^8\) Yet despite the reluctant implementation of the 1816 directive, the course of study plan was an important first step toward formal theological training for the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The key role of Nathan Bangs in this early debate on theological education has not been generally recognized.\(^9\)

Little is known of the content of these early conference courses of study until the 1830's. The earliest printed course of study which I have located is that of the Illinois Conference in 1827.\(^10\) Examples from the 1830's abound, especially in the New York Christian Advocate. The manuscript collection at Drew University, however, includes two almost identical early courses of study—one found among the papers of Bishop John Emory (1789-1835), but not in the Bishop's hand, and another in the hand of Freeborn Garrettson (1752-1827). Although neither one bears a date, they most likely belong to the early or middle 1820's. Garrettson served on the Examining Committee of the New York Conference for several years—1819, 1823, and 1824 at the least\(^11\)—and died in 1827.

The Garrettson and Emory lists may thus be the earliest courses of study which we have "discovered" so far. The text of the Garrettson list, with variations from the Emory list, is given in full below. Author, title, and date of original publication of the less obvious recommended titles are given in the notes.

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\(^7\) Howard, op. cit., p. 65 ff.


A course of reading and Study for the Candidates for the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The holy Scriptures saith "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a work man that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth, and to hold fast the form of sound words; which thou hast heard of me in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus, & to give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." It is recommended to those preachers who are entering into the ministry, to study, and make themselves acquainted with the following points, so as to give Satisfactory Answers in their examination:

1. The General depravity & Corruption of the human heart
2. The doctrine of redemption by Christ—including the doctrine of General attonement
3. The Nature of repentance toward God
4. Justification by faith
5. The direct Witness of the Spirit
6. Holyness of heart and life
7. The divinity of rewards & Punishments
8. The Doctor of perseverance
9. Baptism
10. The resurrection from the dead
11. The eternity of rewards & Punishments
12. The nature of Church government esp. our own

In order to obtain a necessary knowledge on those points, we recommend the reading the following books, viz.—

1. The holy Scriptures.
2. The Methodist discipline
3. Wesley's Sermons
4. His notes
5. His Answer to Taylor on Original sin
6. Fletcher's appeal
7. Saints rest by Baxter
8. Laws serious call
9. Portrait of St. Paul
10. Smith's Lectures on the Sacred office
11. Rollins Ancient History
12. Josephus' Antiquities

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13 "Ghost" in Emory MS.
15 Emory MS adds "in Christ Jesus."
16 Emory MS adds "Jesus."
17 Emory MS adds "future" here.
21 William Law (1786-1761) A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, 1728.
22 John William Fletcher, Portrait of Saint Paul; or, The True Model for Christians and Pastors, 1785.
13. Newton on the prophecies
14. Fletcher's Checks
15. Cokes Commentary & Benson's
16. Benson's Sermons
17. Wood dictionary
18. Mosheam [sic.] Church History or Mr. Wesley's
19. Wesley Philosophy
20. Locke on the understanding and Duncans Logick.

26 John William Fletcher, Checks to Antinomianism, 1771.
30 Johann Lorenz Mosheim (1694-1755) An Ecclesiastical History, Ancient and Modern, 1726; John Wesley, A Concise Ecclesiastical History from the Birth of Christ to the Beginning of the Present Century, 1781.
31 John Wesley, A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation; or, A Compendium of Natural Philosophy, 1763. Here the Emory MS adds: "... with any others which the P E may direct. To be prepared to express, defend, and enforce these truths with propriety and clearness, we recommend them to study the English language—Maury's Grammar." Lindley Murray (1745-1826) English Grammar, 1795, rev. ed., 1818.