

THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND EARLY WESLEYAN MISSIONS IN THE CARIBBEAN

JOHN C. NEAL

Wesleyan missions in the New World began in 1759 with Nathaniel Gilbert, a white Antiguan planter. The first Elders for the West Indian work were ordained and appointed by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1785. One of them was Jeremiah Lambert, whose ministry in Antigua, including the first celebration of Communion, is overlooked. The other was an English lay preacher, John Baxter, whose ministry was extended as an Elder. Violations of British trade embargoes in the West Indies aided American Independence; repercussions therefrom aborted Thomas Coke's appointments of ministers in the Netherlands Antilles. Attempts to station General Superintendents of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) for the British North American Colonies and the West Indies failed. Subsequent relationships between the USA and Britain caused the West Indian work to be transferred to the British Methodist Conference, permanently severing the early links.

The Genesis of Methodism in the Western Hemisphere

The first Wesleyans came to North America for secular purposes but felt compelled to maintain their Methodist witness and commend the gospel. Whereas the first North American preachers were Europeans witnessing to fellow colonists, the Gilberts in Antigua were Creoles who shared the Gospel with fellow West Indians, including African slaves.¹ The story of the planting of Methodist missions in the New World is detailed elsewhere.² This paper traces links between the West Indies and the United States of America and the particular contribution of the MEC, brief as it was, to the genesis of Wesleyan work in the Caribbean.

In May of 2010, a special Conference was held by the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Wesleyan beginnings in the Americas. In fact, this anniversary could have been observed a year earlier, as a planter in Antigua began Methodist witness in 1759. He was Nathaniel Gilbert, named after his father and grandfather, designated III. Associating with his brother Francis in Wandsworth

¹ A Creole is a descendant of European settlers or other ethnic groups who have been born in the British West Indies.

² See John C. Neal, *Wesleyan Missions Revisited—250th Anniversary* (January, 2011) unpublished, but in due course extracts may be on the Methodist Missionary Society History Project website kirsty.murray@ed.ac.uk or <http://www.div.ed.ac.uk>.

(London) and John and Charles Wesley, Nathaniel experienced the saving grace of God. In November of 1758, two of his domestic slaves were baptized by Wesley at Francis' house in what is now called Fairfield Street.³

The Gilberts were reputed to have descended from the great English navigators, explorers, colonists and privateers, Sir Humphrey Gilbert and his half-brother Sir Walter Raleigh.⁴ Edgar Thompson casts doubt on this claim, quoting the High Sheriff of Devon, "It seemed more likely that Nathaniel Gilbert had come from the family of Jonathan Gilbert of Hartford, Connecticut, who was Marshal of the Colony and died 10th December 1682."⁵ The actual pedigree of the Gilberts has not been traced further back than a Daniel Gilbert, born c.1640 in Barbados.⁶

Returning to Antigua in 1759, Nathaniel Gilbert gathered his family and friends in his great house, with domestic slaves in attendance. He shared his evangelical experience, preached to slaves on his and surrounding estates, and formed a Methodist Society in the town of St. John's. His pioneering work was supported and developed by his brother Francis during visits to Antigua 1763-1764 and 1773-1775. Francis Gilbert was one of John Wesley's itinerant preachers in England both before and after these visits. Although not appointed by Wesley, Francis worked with Wesley's approval and support. Only about 200 members were in the Society at the time of the Gilberts' demise. Their ministry was taken up by a shipwright at the naval dockyard in Chatham, John Baxter, who also was a Local Preacher in England. He transferred to the English Harbour dockyard, arriving in Antigua in April of 1778. He found that two women—Sophia Campbell, who was black, and Mary Alley, who was a mulatto—had kept some of the Methodists together after the death of Nathaniel in 1774.⁷ As a layman, Baxter preached and met Classes in the evenings and at weekends, building up the work until there were about 1,000 members or followers.

³ Phyllis Plummer, *Methodism in Wandsworth* (Unpublished printed booklet, n.d.).

⁴ Sir Gilbert Scott, great-grandson of Nathaniel III, wrote of "one of their representatives being Sir Humphrey Gilbert, half-brother and companion in arms to Sir Walter Raleigh" (G. Gilbert Scott, ed., *John Wesley and the Gilberts of Antigua. Personal and Professional Recollections by the Late Sir George Gilbert Scott, R.* [London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1879]). F. F. Bretherton gives the whole letter in Wesley Historical Society *Proceedings*, 137-138. Geo. E. Yate, Madeley Vic'ge, Salop. 3/6/93: "I have heard Mr. Nath'l Gilbert my cousin and my father say that Sir Walter Raleigh was an ancestor of the family." George was the son of Timothy Yate who married Anne Gilbert, the daughter of Nathaniel III and the cousin was Nathaniel IV.

⁵ "This is only one of the many instances in which a rigorous historical research destroys a fond illusion" (Walter Raleigh Gilbert, personal correspondence to Edgar Thompson, 1957, *Nathaniel Gilbert, Lawyer and Evangelist* [London: Epworth Press, 1960], 7-8).

⁶ Vere Langford Oliver, "Pedigree of Gilbert," *The History of the Island of Antigua, one of the Leeward Caribbees in the West Indies, from the first settlement in 1635 to the present time.* [=1834] 3 vols. (London: Mitchell & Hughes, 1896). Online version http://www.archive.org/stream/historyofislando02oliv/historyofislando02oliv_dgvv.tx, 2:12-13.

⁷ A Mulatto (Spanish for "young mule") was the child of a white father and black mother. Mulatto also tends to describe further combinations of parentage, although these had different names.

September of 1766 is recognized as the time when Philip Embury, encouraged by Barbara Heck, formed two Methodist classes in New York. The following year they were supported by Thomas Webb, retired with the title and pay of a Captain, who was civilian Barrack Master of Albany from July 2, 1764.⁸ Webb established the first Methodist Society on Long Island and Methodist classes in Philadelphia in 1767. Robert Strawbridge may have predated their work in Maryland, c. 1763-1764. A Minority Report issued by a Joint Commission of Methodism in 1916 opposed this earlier date as conclusive documentation is lacking.⁹ The extensive growth of Methodism together with the independence of the United States demanded an autonomous church.

The Methodist Episcopal Church

The Conference that organized the MEC was held in Baltimore at Christmas, 1784. It elected fifteen men as Elders. Of this number, the twelve who were present at the Christmas Conference were then ordained. Among the twelve were Freeborn Garrettson and James O. Cromwell, who were set apart for Nova Scotia; they sailed in February of 1785. John Tunnel, Henry Wilkins and Beverley Allen were “not present but were ordained after the session.” John Dickins, Ignatius Pigman and Caleb Boyes were chosen as Deacons.

Both John Wesley and Thomas Coke considered the work in Antigua to be an integral part of the work in the Americas. Consequently, Jeremiah Lambert was ordained for the island of Antigua, the first American “Missionary” to non-European people. John Baxter was one of the three elected *in absentia*; thus his name did not appear on the list of those ordained on January 2, 1785.

Jeremiah Lambert

Lambert was a native of New Jersey and had the honor to be the first Methodist preacher designated in the *Minutes* to an appointment beyond the Alleghenies. As early as 1783 he was appointed to Holston County, Tennessee, where he spent one year. The early evangelists were constantly on the move. Lambert traveled extensively through Tennessee and as far as Virginia. He had “a large circuit, but he made his way as best he could in the name of and for the sake of Him who had said, ‘Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the earth.’”¹⁰

⁸ Albany was named after the British Barracks on the Isle of Wight and in Regent Street, London. Albany housed loyalists, refugees and Hessian troops during the Revolution. One quarter of the British forces were these German troops, some 18,000 fighting in the Battle of Long Island in 1776.

⁹ Norman W. Taggart, *The Irish in World Methodism, 1760-1900* (London: Epworth Press, 1986), 53 citing *Methodist History* 4.2 (January, 1966): 7.

¹⁰ Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. 12th ed., 1860, 4 vols. (New York: T. Mason & G. Lane, 1839, 1840). Online version http://ccel.org/b/bangs/history_mec/HMEC06.HTM 2:2:8.

A hand written copy of Coke's first *Journal* included entries for January 22-February 6, 1785 where he wrote, "I have now given over all thought of going to the West Indies: but I have taken a ship for Brother Lambert an Elder: he is an excellent young man and will I trust be a great blessing to that country (Antigua)."¹¹ American histories do not mention that Jeremiah Lambert went to Antigua, and official British histories state that he died before he could take up his appointment. However, Lambert did in fact go to Antigua in 1785 before and during the period when Baxter went to North America for ordination. Anne Gilbert in Antigua recorded that a Mr. Lambert, a Methodist Preacher from America, "supplied in Mr. Baxter's place" during his absence from Antigua.¹² Her sister, Elizabeth Hart, wrote that she also heard his preaching before he returned to America.¹³

On March 13, 1786, Dr. Coke said of John Baxter in Antigua, "But we have only that single minister in those islands, Mr. *Lambert*, whom we sent from the States, being obliged to return on account of his ill state of health."¹⁴ William Warrener affirmed this at the Leeds Missionary Meeting by saying, "Mr. Jeremiah Lambert was then sent to him (Baxter) from America, whither he was soon obliged to return, on account of his being consumptive."¹⁵ It is clear from the sisters' letters from Antigua, Dr. Coke's own writings, and the testimony of Warrener that Jeremiah Lambert did spend a few months in Antigua early in 1785.

Without documentation, it is presumed that for a few months Lambert met the Methodist classes at the Gilbert Estate and Parham and in St John's, and preached the Gospel on those plantations that were open to him. Later, missionaries were required to keep journals detailing their activities, which were forwarded to Dr. Coke and the Missionary Committee instituted in 1790. Schedules included the number of sermons, exhortations, Leaders Meetings, Class Meetings, Band Meetings and catechizing per week, the hours spent in pastoral visitation, and the number of miles traveled by horse per year.¹⁶

As well as pioneering work in North America before the establishment of the MEC, Lambert was almost certainly the first Methodist to celebrate

¹¹ John A. Vickers, ed., *The Journals of Dr. Thomas Coke* [JDTC] (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005) 44 f/n 100. Quoted from the notebook of Francis Thursby which includes a handwritten copy of Coke's first *Journal* located in the Methodist Missionary Society Archives (MMSA) Special Collections Reading Room, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London.

¹² *Letter*, (June 1, 1804), Anne Gilbert recounting her "Rise and progress of Methodism," MMSA West Indian Correspondence 1803-1817 (WIC) Fiche Box 1:37.

¹³ *Letter*, (May 5, 1804), Elizabeth Hart, MMSA WIC 1:31.

¹⁴ Thomas Coke, *An Address to the Pious and Benevolent, proposing an annual subscription for the support of the missionaries in the Highlands and the adjacent islands of Scotland, the Isles of Jersey, Guernsey and Newfoundland, the West Indies, and the Province of Nova Scotia and Quebec* (London, March 13, 1786), in R. Davies, A. R. George, and G. Rupp, *A History of The Methodist Church in Great Britain* (HMCGB), 5 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 4:210.

¹⁵ *Methodist Magazine* [MM] a continuation of the *Arminian Magazine* [AM] (1814), 37:514.

¹⁶ The St. John's Building Account disbursed £4. 8. 6d on May 1, 1784, "To 7 bushels oats at diff. times in August & December last for Mr. Baxter's horse @ 12/- & bag 4/6." Lambert may have used Baxter's horse early in 1785.

Communion in the West Indies. The MEC was established so that its members in the United States could receive all the means of grace and sacramental services. The MEC Constitution, Section V, explained the duties of Elders:

- Q. 2 What is his duty?
 A (1) (2) To administer Baptism and the Lord's Supper¹⁷

As Lambert was ordained to this sacramental ministry specifically for Antigua, he would have wasted no time in officiating at a Communion Service. This would explain the mysterious entry in the St. John's Building Account on April 9th of 1785, "To ½ doz. red port for uses of the Society 38/- p. 19."¹⁸ Evidently, six bottles costing 38/per dozen were required to serve up to 1,000 members.

When Baxter was on his way to Baltimore for his June ordination, the Building Account was most likely the only operational account with accessible funds. The costs of building were raised locally, and the expenses of ministers were met from collections and pew rents. Coke worked tirelessly in raising subscriptions that were used for sea passages, outfitting, and medical or funeral expenses. From 1787, appointed missionaries kept personal accounts with Thomas Coke.

Unfortunately for the Antigua mission, Jeremiah Lambert died shortly after returning to America. His obituary in 1786 stated that he was "an Elder six years in the work, of whom it is said, 'a man of sound judgment, good gifts, of genuine piety, and very useful, humble and holy; diligent in life, and resigned in death; much esteemed in the connection and justly lamented in his death.' We do not sorrow as men without hope, but expect shortly to join him and all those who rest from their labors."¹⁹

Historian Abel Stevens quoted Thomas Ware's eulogy: "He had in four years (when the MEC was organized), without the parade of classical learning, or any theological training, literally attained to an eminence in the pulpit which no ordinary man could reach by the aid of human means whatever. He was most especially a primitive Methodist preacher, preaching out of the pulpit as well as in it. The graces with which he was eminently adorned were intelligence, innocence, and love. These imparted a glow of eloquence to all he said and did." Elsewhere there was a reference to "the dove-like Lambert."²⁰

¹⁷ Bangs, http://www.ccel.org/b/bangs/history_mec/HMEC08.HTM 28/10/04. 1:3:3,13/36.

¹⁸ Reproduced in *The Methodist Archivist* 1 (1957) published by the Methodist Historical Society of the Caribbean and the Americas (Kingston, Jamaica); a photocopy of page 1 of the Building Account appears in *For Ever Beginning: Two Hundred Years of Methodism in the Western Area* (Donald S. Ching, ed., [Kingston, Jamaica: Literature Dept., Methodist Church, Jamaica, 1960], 40-41).

¹⁹ Bangs, 1:3:3:254. Abel Stevens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America*, 4 vols. (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1864-1867). Digital ed. Holiness Data Ministry, Wesley Center for Applied Theology, N.W. Nazarene University, Nampa, Idaho, 83683. No page numbers. Vol. 2 – Book 2, Ch. 4.

²⁰ Stevens, 2:4:3, "Introduction of Methodism into the West."

John Baxter

John Baxter appealed for missionary help for Antigua and had inquired of Wesley in 1783 about attendance at the Methodist Conference where ordinations normally took place. John Wesley intended Dr. Coke to ordain John Baxter at the MEC Christmas Day Conference in 1784, but Baxter was unable to be present due to his employment at the dockyard. In May of the following year a Conference again convened in Baltimore. The American edition of Coke's journal of his first American visit (1784-1785) shows that Baxter was ordained here on behalf of the MEC by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury. Coke wrote that on Thursday, June 2, 1785, "we ordained five Elders, bros. Boyer, Tunnell, Pigman, Baxter and Foster. The day before we ordained them as Deacons."²¹ Later that day, Dr. Coke left for England, and Baxter returned to Antigua with the status and authority of an Elder of the MEC and became a full-time missionary.²²

The *Minutes* listed Baxter and Lambert under the American stations. This is interpreted as confirmation of the decision by the American Conference, as English Methodism had not appointed Baxter and Lambert, did not support them with financial grants, and accepted no responsibility for maintaining their work.²³ Although Lambert had died, both names appear for the first time in the *Minutes* of the British Conference of the following year under *Antigua*. John Baxter had resigned his position as Under Store Keeper at Nelson's dockyard at a salary of £400 a year in order to visit America for his ordination. Anne Gilbert recounted how "Mr. Baxter returned free from every other employment."

In context, Baxter's major work was with African slaves, whose complete spiritual darkness was given a measure of light. There were many examples of a real work of grace. The chief spiritual quality of the majority was the possession of tremendous enthusiasm. Baxter recognized the Wesleyan Church was largely a society of beginners in the Christian faith who lacked local leaders. "The work is not deep, it was an outward reformation, and the majority wanted to be thought religious." Baxter realized "he was in an enemies [*sic*] country, where lust and appetite hold complete dominion over the general masses."²⁴

Despite these difficulties, at the time of Dr. Coke's arrival in 1786 there were 1,100 in Methodist Classes, mostly Afro-Antiguans. The American Methodist Conference in 1786 had reported 117 preachers and membership

²¹ When Dr. Coke wrote "we ordained" we can presume that he and Francis Asbury as Bishops with other Elders acted on behalf of the MEC. See John A. Vickers, ed., *The Journals of Dr. Thomas Coke* [JDTC] (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 65, n. 191.

²² After a lengthy discussion in *The Methodist Archivist*, Baxter's ordination by Coke in Baltimore was verified by John Vickers (December, 1965), 2:17:21-22.

²³ John A. Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1969), 99.

²⁴ *Letter*, John Baxter to John Wesley, (June, 1782), in Kenneth E. Towers, *Methodism in the Tropical West: A Story in the History and Religions of the West Indian Church* (MMSA, MMSL AM -CR 1) G.G. Findlay, & W.W. Holdsworth, *History of the Wesleyan Missionary Society* 5 vols. (London: Methodist Church Office, 1921-1924), 2:35.

figures of:

White	18,791	
Colored	<u>1,890</u>	
for a total of	20,681	of whom 1,000 were in Antigua. ²⁵

As the Antiguan Methodists were almost entirely Negroes and colored, this indicates that a small number of African-Americans were in U.S. Methodist Societies at this early date. Although Methodist members in Antigua included African, colored and white, the Moravian meeting places at St. John's and English Harbour were specifically for Negroes.

Sarah Moore said that Baxter "was introduced to my Aunt Mrs. Ceeley . . . and on that day he preached in her house."²⁶ After a few years in Antigua, at least before April of 1782, Baxter married another aunt of Sarah's. Unfortunately the name of this lady is unknown, as is the place and date of her marriage to John Baxter. An educated guess is that she was a widow, sister, or daughter of a shop-keeper or artisan.²⁷ Baxter wrote, "The house we now have is a life estate of my wife's, so during her lifetime I am not distressed [*sic*]; but I want to see a house of our own that the work may start. As soon as this is accomplished, and we can maintain a preacher, I hope some of our brethren will come to our assistance."²⁸

Although Mrs. Baxter has been described as a lady "of some property" in the island, this life estate implied that she had occupancy during her lifetime, after which the house would revert to other beneficiaries of a will and not to John. The Baxters may not have occupied it (except at weekends) until John resigned from the dockyard in 1785. In any case, the context of Baxter's letter shows that this house was their place of worship in the town.²⁹ Baxter would erect the first purpose-built Methodist chapel in the West Indies in 1783.

After the first ministers from Britain and Ireland were stationed, membership reached a peak of 4,000 in 1801. In 1803, Baxter reported, "The slaves are in a better condition than the free coloured people, having a weekly allowance of salt provisions, two suits of clothes in the year and a sufficient quantity of land to plant for their own use."³⁰

Baxter's sacramental ministry was the fruit of his ordination by the MEC. The story of his work in the St. Vincent Carib Mission is beyond the scope of this paper. This Mission failed in 1789 following a revolt, and the Caribs were transported to Honduras.³¹ Baxter spent short periods in Dominica and left there in 1803 with yellow fever. He continued as Superintendent in

²⁵ The first American returns classified "colored" for everyone not of pure Caucasian descent.

²⁶ Sarah Moore Jr., Antigua, (April 26, 1814), MMSA, WIC, 1:28.

²⁷ Robert Glen, personal correspondence.

²⁸ Letter, John Baxter, Antigua (June 10, 1782), MM (1790) 13:339.

²⁹ Anonymous letter, MM, 1800, but almost certainly by Baxter.

³⁰ MM, 1803, 25:588.

³¹ Findlay & Holdsworth, *History . . .*, 2:43-48.

Antigua, apart from a one-year furlough that was spent in England, c.1799-1800.³² With declining health, he wrote on June 12, 1804, "I beg leave to come home next year, and become a supernumerary, if I am not able to take a circuit."³³ This hope was not fulfilled; he died in August, 1806.

American Independence and the Netherlands Antilles

But for international conflicts preceding Coke's first visit, MEC Elders might have been sent to islands in the Dutch Windward Islands. When the Dutch lost Brazil to the Portuguese in 1654, Sephardic Jews of Iberian descent were expelled. Many settled in the Dutch island of Curaçao where they became the principal merchants controlling trade and shipping. Later, the majority of Jews migrated to Dutch Sint Eustatius (Statia), to St. Thomas in the Danish Virgin Islands, and to New Amsterdam (soon to be renamed New York).

Statia supplied chandlers' goods and ammunition for the American Revolution. Weapons and gunpowder manufactured in Sweden and the Netherlands were run past the British blockade and shipped to Statia. In 1776, munitions were a lucrative trade: the margin of profit on gunpowder was 120%.³⁴ To aid in blockade running, the Continental Congress purchased the brig *Defiance* and converted it into a man-of-war. Renamed *Andrew Doria* the brig sailed to Statia to protect this clandestine trade. President Franklin D. Roosevelt presented a plaque that was unveiled at Fort Oranje on December 12, 1939:

IN COMMEMORATION
OF THE
SALUTE TO THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES
FIRED IN THIS FORT ON 16 NOVEMBER 1776
BY ORDER OF
JOHANNES DE GRAAFF
GOVERNOR OF SINT EUSTATIUS
IN REPLY TO A NATIONAL GUN SALUTE
FIRED BY THE
UNITED STATES BRIG-OF-WAR ANDREW DORIA
UNDER CAPTAIN ISAAH ROBINSON
OF THE CONTINENTAL NAVY

HERE THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
WAS FIRST FORMALLY ACKNOWLEDGED TO A
NATIONAL VESSEL BY A FOREIGN OFFICIAL

PRESENTED BY FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

³² Conference Obituary, British Methodist Church *Minutes*, 1806 (London: Wesleyan Church Office).

³³ *Letter*, John Baxter to Joseph Benson, MMSA, Box 112, folder 1803-1804. Handwriting difficult to decipher.

³⁴ J. Hartog, *History of St. Eustatius*, (Aruba: De Wit Stores N.V., 1976) 66.

Subsequent activities led to a fourth Anglo-Dutch war breaking out in 1780. Britain was determined to destroy the supply-base of the American “rebels.” After several naval battles, Statia was occupied by Admiral George Brydges Rodney from February of 1781. Jewish merchants had their goods confiscated and were deported, and the warehouses were emptied. It was estimated that the English booty was worth three or four million pounds sterling. This diversion to Statia in February delayed Rodney’s fleet until May 4, allowing a French fleet to support the Americans at Yorktown and compelling the English to capitulate. The British occupied Statia from February to November of 1781, when they were expelled by the French. The Dutch regained Statia in 1784, but resentment against the British was entrenched. Soon after, the slave Black Harry, who had become of member of the Methodist Society in America, began preaching (c. 1785-1786).³⁵

A direct consequence of Statia’s contribution to the successful American Revolution was that Statia’s Acting Governor, Johannes Runnels, rejected Dr. Thomas Coke on his visit in January of 1787. Runnels was a merchant who had suffered at the hands of the British. Although there were already 200 Methodists on Statia, Governor Runnels made certain that no locally raised Wesleyan preachers were stationed on either Statia or the nearby island of Saba, for which he was also administrator.

MEC Superintendents of the West Indian Work

With the express wishes of Wesley and Coke, it was proposed that “Mr. Freeborn Garrettson be elected and ordained a superintendent for the societies in Nova Scotia and the West Indies.”³⁶ After ordination, Garrettson wished to return to Nova Scotia first, but was appointed a Presiding Elder on the eastern Maryland peninsula. Although duly nominated, Garrettson had no direct dealings with the West Indies.

In 1789, the Leeds Conference *Minutes* for the first time listed separately the Caribbean appointments. After the Home Stations, which included those in Ireland, the record reads:

THE WEST INDIES: 1 *Antigua*, Matthew Lumb, John Harper; 2 *St Christopher*, William Warrenner; 3 *St Eustatius*, George Skirit; 4 *Nevis*, Thomas Owen; 5 *St Vincent, in the Caribbee [sic] Division*, John Baxter; *in the English Division*, Robert Gamble, John Clark; 6 *Dominica*, William McCormick; 7 *Barbados*, Benjamin Pearce; 8 *Saba*, William Brazier; 9 *Tortola [and]* 10 *Santa Cruz*, William Hammet.

The proposed appointments to Statia and Saba did not take place, but many others were also curtailed because of premature death, illness or other miti-

³⁵ Harry of Sint Eustatius is to be distinguished from Black Harry Hosier, the traveling companion of Asbury.

³⁶ Vickers, JDTC, 115-116; Bangs, http://www.ccel.org/b/bangs/history_mec?HMEC08.HTM 28/10/2004 1:3:22:34.

gating circumstances.³⁷

The call for preachers was so great on the North American continent that the church in the United States could not offer any continuing assistance to the West Indian Islands. Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and the West Indies appeared in the British *Minutes* in 1787, and were taken off the stations by the American Church in 1788, thus severing the direct links after four years. Reciprocating, in 1789 the MEC statistical return was omitted from the British *Minutes*. Dr. Coke forwarded membership figures in 1789:

	Whites	Blacks	Coloured ³⁸
1. Antigua	70	2740	
2. St. Christopher's	50		650
3. St. Eustatius	8		250
4. St. Vincents	250		139
5. Dominica			24
6. Barbados	6		

In all 3,949 * besides catechumens³⁹ [*the figures add up to 4,187]

Dr. Coke insisted that more ministers were needed, and in the following years he and John Wesley ordained additional British and Irish ministers for the West Indian work.

Even though he never lived in the United States, William Black had been ordained in 1789 by the MEC as the presiding elder in British North America. Coke intended for Black to be appointed Superintendent of work throughout the Caribbean islands, and the British Conference stationed him in St. Christopher's (St. Kitts)⁴⁰ In order for him to be introduced to the work and staff, Coke reported of his final visit to the West Indies: "Mr. William Black, our presiding elder in the Province of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, accompanied me, and was some consolation to me in my (hazardous) voyage."⁴¹ They landed in St. Eustatius on the last day of 1792. Here the Methodists were still persecuted and, in the absence of any missionaries, a dozen little classes met in corners.

Coke hired a small sloop as the cheapest method of assembling the

³⁷ St. Rupert's Bay in Dominica was the graveyard of missionaries through malaria and yellow fever. We noted that Baxter left there with yellow fever. The first minister, William M'Cormock (McCormick), died soon after arrival. Eight of the first ten ministers died within a short time of arrival. The other two broke down in health and had to leave.

³⁸ British spelling in historical documents is retained. The above descriptions varied, but later distinguished between Black and Coloured. This does not indicate slave and free. Although the majority of "Black" were African slaves some were free artisans, likewise, "Coloured" included some who were slaves. After 1789, British membership was noted as White, Free Coloured and Black, and Slaves. For more detail on ethnic designations, see paper in preparation for MMS History Project Conference, November, 2011, on the theme *Gender and Ethnicity in Methodist Mission History*.

³⁹ Vickers, *Coke's Journal*, 1789 (not in the 1816 ed.), 16.

⁴⁰ Vickers, *Thomas Coke*, 164; Donald Ching, *Harry's Children* William Fish Lecture, (Jamaica, 1961), HMCGB, 3:58.

⁴¹ Vickers, JDTC, 200.

Preachers for a “Little Conference” in Antigua.⁴² Coke himself collected Mr. Harper and Mr. and Mrs. Owens from Tortola, and returned for Warrener, Black and McVean in St. Kitts.⁴³ Pattison was in Nevis where a storm enforced an over-night stay at Walter Nesbit’s. “In the evening” says Coke, “I collected the blacks and endeavored to profit them as far as I was able.”⁴⁴ Presumably, William’s wife had accompanied him on this voyage. They arrived in Antigua where the ministers from the Windward Islands joined them on February 8, 1793.

As noted earlier, the American proposal to appoint Garrettson as Superintendent of all the remaining British American colonies was not affected. Likewise, Black’s transfer was prevented by the reluctance of the Methodists of Nova Scotia to relinquish him. (He ended his connection with the Americans in 1800 and became Chairman of the Nova Scotia District of the British Conference until he retired in 1812.)

After John Wesley’s death in 1791, Dr. Coke was the only effective link between the American and British Connexions until the establishment of a Missionary Committee in 1804.

Conclusion

Methodism in the New World of the Americas began with spontaneous evangelism in 1759. Several years before the organization of Methodist work in North America, Nathaniel Gilbert formed Methodist Classes in Antigua. This pioneering mission developed with the support of Nathaniel’s brother Francis when he returned to his native soil. As a lay preacher, John Baxter extended the church work from 1778. After a quarter of a century, Jeremiah Lambert and John Baxter were ordained the first Elders for Antigua by the MEC in 1785. Lambert’s ground-breaking ministry included the first celebrations of Holy Communion in that year. Baxter’s ordination by the MEC enabled him to continue his evangelistic and ecclesiastical vocation until 1804.

Jewish traders in Statia supplied merchandise to aid the American Revolution and Declaration of Independence. Retributions arising from infringements of trade embargoes resulted in the frustration of Dr. Coke’s missionary appointments in the Dutch Windward Islands in 1787. Attempts to appoint MEC Elders as General Superintendents of the West Indian work failed.

Direct involvement of the MEC with the fledgling missions was confined to the period 1785 to 1788 and limited to the ordinations of Lambert and Baxter. With Coke’s demise, links with the MEC were terminated, and the

⁴² A sloop was a one-masted sail boat used for inter-island trade. Whereas lightly armed “packets” were used for trans-Atlantic letters and dispatches, sloops were used as local mail boats. The Jamaican sloop built of durable cedar was used by pirates because of its shallow draft, maneuverability and speed of about 12 knots (13 mph).

⁴³ It could take 3 to 4 days to sail from Tortola to St. Kitts with a passage costing between £30 and £40 sterling.

⁴⁴ Vickers, JDTC, 186.

West Indian work continued with British sponsorship.