

Mission to Canada

by Norman A. McNairn

The Methodist Conference of 1788 was held in New York. After the Conference was over, Bishop Francis Asbury suddenly made up his mind that the time had come to press forward with the Methodist cause into upper New York State. Freeborn Garrettson was put in charge of nine young preachers and sent up the Hudson River to "break up new ground," as Asbury liked to put it, wherever they might find a favorable response.

Up to this time little headway had been made by the Methodists in this direction. The main line of Methodist expansion had been to the south and southwest, where the frontiers had been wide open for settlement. In New York State no Methodist societies existed to the north of Westchester County except for one at Ashgrove, founded by Philip Embury when several families from the John Street Church in New York moved to the Ashgrove area to settle. Now it was the task of Garrettson and his team of missionaries to fan out on both sides of the Hudson all the way up to Lake Champlain.

This new move by Asbury was by no means an unreasoned impulse. It was made in the light of a changing social situation. For years the frontier of northwestern New York had been closed to settlement because jurisdiction over the land was claimed by both New York and Massachusetts. The conflict had been finally resolved in 1786. Large tracts of land had passed into the hands of speculators, and were beginning to attract into the territory a growing tide of settlers from New England.¹ Many small communities were without religious services, and the number of needy settlements would inevitably increase over the next few years.

Into this expanding field the northern thrust of the Methodist mission was both timely and effective. During the next five years the work of Garrettson and his men succeeded in rooting Methodism firmly throughout the region, winning 2,500 members.

Sooner or later the northerly penetration of these travelling preachers was bound to arrive at the Canadian border. The question would then arise whether it ought to stop there. The first of the New York preachers to penetrate into Canada was William Losee. He had served for a year as a probationer in the Lake Champlain area when he requested the permission of Freeborn Garrettson to "range at large" and to visit Canada, where he had some relatives.

¹ See Ray Billington, *Westward Expansion: a History of the American Frontier*, pp. 252-261.

Garrettson agreed, and in January of 1790 Losee crossed the border at St. Regis, over the ice of the St. Lawrence River. From Johnstown (Cornwall, Ontario) he travelled through the new settlements along the river up as far as Kingston and the Bay of Quinte. Along the way he visited with pioneer families and held religious meetings. On his return he brought with him a petition from many Canadian settlers requesting the Methodist Conference to send them a missionary.

The petition was favorably received. Losee volunteered to go, and he was appointed with the approval of both Garrettson and Asbury to do mission work in Canada. In February of 1791 he crossed the frozen river below Kingston. The work of William Losee marks the official beginning of the Methodist Episcopal mission to Canada, an enterprise which was steadily sustained and augmented from that time forward.

The Canadian Frontier

In an earlier article we reviewed the Methodist mission to Nova Scotia.² In order to avoid confusion it is necessary to point out that Canada was a completely separate British colony at the time we are considering, and remained so until Confederation in 1867.

At the time when William Losee entered Canada this colony embraced two distinct regions. These were politically set apart in 1791 as the Province of Lower Canada and the Province of Upper Canada. Lower Canada, now included in the Province of Quebec, was mainly French. Upper Canada, so named because it was up-river above Montreal, later became the Province of Ontario.

Although the British had gained control of Canada in 1763, the French remained numerically superior in Lower Canada. In 1784 the total population was only about 113,000 and of these only 15,000 were of British origin, and many of these had actually come from the American colonies to the south.³ The French language and institutions were maintained under British rule, and the British presence caused less disturbance than might be expected. Early in the British administration instructions were sent to the Governor-General "to the end that the Church of England may be established both in Principle and Practice, and that the said Inhabitants may by Degrees be induced to embrace the Protestant Religion,"⁴ but the Governors had the good sense to recognize that the good will of the French could be maintained only if they were left free to enjoy the Roman Catholic religion that was so deeply ingrained in their culture.

² *Methodist History*, January 1974.

³ *Censuses of Canada, 1665-1871* (Ottawa, 1876), p. 74.

⁴ Ontario Bureau of Archives, *Third Report*, 1905, p. lv.

English-speaking settlements on the land in Lower Canada were of very limited extent until after 1791. Large numbers of Loyalist refugees had come into the Province during the Revolutionary War, and when peace came they would gladly have settled in the undeveloped area to the east of the Richelieu River. But this was not open to them because the boundary with the United States was not yet fixed.⁵ Once that was drawn, the whole region known as the Eastern Townships was rapidly ceded for settlement, and was occupied mainly by new immigrants from the New England States. By 1812 some 9,000 settlers had made this largely an English-speaking section.

Upper Canada was opened for settlement only in 1784. Prior to that the only inhabitants were Indians, a few scattered traders, a small French settlement at Detroit, plus a few military posts around which a small number of refugee families had gathered during the American Revolution. This western country had never been colonized by the French, partly because there was ample space for them in the more accessible Quebec region, and partly because the long series of rapids in the St. Lawrence River above Montreal made communication with the interior expensive and difficult.

During the Revolutionary War the military had improved transportation up the river and this drew the untapped resources of the country to the attention of the government. In 1784 the Loyalist regiments were disbanded and the officers and men with their families were settled on newly surveyed tracts of land along the Upper St. Lawrence and the Lake Ontario shore as well as along the Niagara River. These settlers numbered about ten thousand. To this figure must be added a substantial number of Six Nations Indians from New York State who had remained loyal to the British during the war. These were given an extensive reserve on both sides of the Grand River north of Lake Erie.

The contrast between Lower Canada and Upper Canada can scarcely be over-emphasized. The Lower province was older, more populous, more commercially advanced, with a predominantly French and Roman Catholic culture. The Upper province was all newly-opened frontier, sparsely settled with English-speaking Loyalist veterans and their families. What is more, the feudal system which persisted among the French was not allowed to extend into Upper Canada. The settlers were not tenants on large estates but owners of their own land, which was a great spur to the clearing and cultivation of farms.

By 1791 the population of Upper Canada had risen to 20,000. The original Loyalist settlers were joined by an influx of families from

⁵ M. L. Hanson and J. B. Brobnor, *The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples* (Yale University Press, 1940), I, p. 59.

the United States who found the new Republic inhospitable to persons of their political sympathies. John Graves Simcoe, a British army officer, arrived in 1792 to administer the Province with the title of Lieutenant-Governor, under the authority of the Governor-General at Quebec. During his term of office Simcoe set the pattern of administration for this frontier society. There was then no town in the whole province, only a small village at Kingston and another at the mouth of the Niagara River. The Lieutenant-Governor had firm ideas for making his province as English as possible. He saw no future in the fur trade, and determined to establish a settled agricultural economy by making land easily available and by promoting immigration. If the immigrants came from the States, well and good, so long as they were prepared to take the oath of allegiance. The government was set up on English lines with a lower house of legislators elected by a limited franchise and an upper house appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor. The English officials who came with Simcoe soon became a privileged oligarchy with aristocratic pretensions. The intention was to make the Church of England an established church, and it was endowed with large grants of land in every township known as the Clergy Reserves, and granted special privileges which became in later years a source of protracted political strife.

The Loyalists who settled in Upper Canada were a different type of men from those who populated Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. William H. Nelson makes the distinction clear in *The American Tory*.⁶ Referring to the American Colonies in the 1770's he says, "The main centres of Tory strength fall into two distinct regions: The first was along the thinly settled western frontier . . . the other was the maritime region of the Middle Colonies." Those who settled in Nova Scotia represented the latter, drawn from the more affluent and urbanized culture of the seaboard. Those who moved into Upper Canada were mostly frontiersmen from western New England, New York and Pennsylvania.

It is commonly assumed that these Loyalists were mostly English. Barclay says, "for the most part they were of English origin." Such an assumption is not supported by the facts, as Hansen and Brebner point out on the basis of their research:

Many of the conservative Dutch, Scots and Germans of the valleys of the upper Hudson and the Mohawk had refused to join the revolt, and when General Burgoyne in 1777 started south from Canada . . . they flocked to his standard.⁷

It is quite misleading therefore to refer to these people as English.

⁶ Nelson, *The American Tory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 168.

⁷ *Mingling of Peoples*, I, 47.

Even though some of them had been born across the sea, it would be more accurate to describe them as Americans. If they sided with the British it was less from devotion to English imperialism than from an aversion toward revolutionary violence. Thus the population of Upper Canada was such that it possessed more natural affinities with the culture of American States than with that of its own ruling class who were mostly English.

Governor Simcoe's land policy attracted a steady flow of immigration from the United States into Upper Canada. Land was cheaper and easier to obtain in Canada than in most other areas. It was a time when thousands of land-hungry people were on the move in what Ray Billington terms "the greatest movement of peoples America has known."⁸ Part of this westward stream was thus diverted to the north. By 1812 the population of Upper Canada had risen to 80,000. "It was estimated," writes George Brown, "that eight out of ten people in the province were American by birth or descent."⁹ Loyalists and their descendants probably comprised about half of this "American" population.

Methodism Takes Root

This extensive background description has been necessary in order to gain an accurate picture of the peculiar social situation which faced William Losee and those who followed him as Methodist missionaries on the Canadian frontier.

There were even some Methodists in Canada before the missionaries arrived. An English army officer named Tuffy held Methodist meetings in Quebec until his return to Britain in 1784, and some of his circle, in the opinion of Sweet, were ready to welcome Methodist missionaries when they arrived at a later date.¹⁰ In Upper Canada three others were breaking ground among the pioneers. James McCarthy, converted under George Whitefield's ministry in America, came to Ernesttown, near Kingston, and finding some Methodists, held meetings in their homes. His career was cut short by some bigots from Kingston, and he disappeared under mysterious circumstances.¹¹

James Lyons came to Adolphustown as a teacher in 1788. He was a Methodist exhorter from the States, and did visiting and praying among the people, winning some converts.¹² Further to the west, Major George Neal, a native of New York who had served in the

⁸ *Westward Expansion*, p. 246.

⁹ George W. Brown, *Building the Canadian Nation* (Toronto: Dent, 1942), p. 181.

¹⁰ Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, p. 130. (He misquotes his source here.)

¹¹ J. E. Sanderson, *The First Century of Methodism in Canada* (Toronto: Briggs, 1908, 1910), I, p. 27.

¹² *Ibid.*

British army, settled near Niagara in 1787, and began a long and useful career as a part-time Methodist preacher, making many converts in the Niagara-Long Point area. One of Neal's converts, Christian Warner, organized the second Methodist class in Canada, was its leader for the rest of his life, and erected one of the early meeting houses.¹³

Even more interesting for Methodist history is the fact that in the township of Augusta, not far from the present town of Prescott, Ontario, there was a little cluster of Methodist families who had formerly been connected with the John Street Methodist Church in New York. Hecks and Lawrences, Emburys, Detlors, Switzers and Ruckles, all familiar names in early American Methodist history, had settled here and organized the first Methodist class in Canada. These were Palatine German families who had come from Ireland to New York, bringing their Methodist evangelicalism with them. Leaving New York City prior to the Revolution, these families had settled in Washington County, northeast of Albany, and formed the Ashgrove Methodist Society, under the leadership of Philip Embury. At the time of the Revolution several of the Ashgrove families had moved to Canada. Philip Embury's widow, since married to John Lawrence, with her two sons and a brother went north with the refugees. When the first Methodist class in Canada was formed, Samuel Embury, a son of Philip, was leader.¹⁴

It is highly unlikely that Freeborn Garrettson and William Losee were unaware of these developments north of the border. Losee had relatives on the Canadian side. Garrettson visited the remaining members of the Ashgrove Society in 1789. From them he must have learned something about their brethren and relatives who had emigrated. Many Loyalists visited their former homes and friends after the war, and it is likely that through such a visit the Ashgrove Methodists were in touch with the Heck circle in Augusta.

The knowledge of such openings for Methodist outreach in Canada which came to Garrettson and Losee through these channels would help to account for Losee's mission and Garrettson's willingness to let him go. The only other explanation offered, namely that Losee wanted to visit his relatives, by itself is hardly sufficient to account for Garrettson's giving permission, for the discipline exercised by the Methodist Church over its travelling preachers was hardly that indulgent. Losee's desire must have coincided with Garrettson's feeling that the Methodists in Canada

¹³ Abel Stevens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the U.S.A.* (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1867), II, p. 397 (Note the correction in III, p. 169.)

¹⁴ J. F. Hurst, *History of Methodism* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1902-1904), VII, p. 36.

needed a preacher, and his wish to know whether Canada offered a good field for the Methodist mission.

On his second journey to Canada William Losee concentrated his efforts in the area of Kingston and the Bay of Quinte on the shores of Lake Ontario. Classes were organized, converts won, and work was begun on the first two Methodist church buildings in the Province, one at Hay Bay and the other at Ernesttown. The Hay Bay Church, since enlarged, is still preserved, and was shown on the cover of the January 1974 issue of *Methodist History*.

At the Conference of 1792, William Losee was sent back to Canada along with Darius Dunham, one of Garrettson's original New York missionaries. Dunham had been ordained that year, and was thus Losee's superior and the first ordained Methodist preacher to serve in Upper Canada. He took over the Kingston circuit while Losee went down river and organized the Matilda circuit with the Heck-Embury class as its nucleus.

Losee had fallen in love with an attractive young woman in the Kingston area, but Dunham had the advantage of propinquity. When the young lady married Dunham the shock was too much for poor Losee. He left Canada and dropped out of the preaching career he had so effectively begun. Darius Dunham remained, becoming a tower of strength to the Methodist work in Canada, and spending the remainder of his life in the country of his adoption. Anson Green, who saw and heard Dunham at Hay Bay in 1825, observed, "This happy old veteran . . . prayed for sinners with great energy, and sometimes used the most terrific expressions."¹⁵

At the start of the Methodist work in Canada it was still not certain whether help from the States could be relied on. The original subscription paper for the Hay Bay church, dating from 1792, actually makes the suggestion of obtaining preachers from Britain.¹⁶ In view of the stresses within the English Conference following the death of Wesley it is unlikely that help from that quarter would have been forthcoming, even if it had been actually sought. Such assistance was made unnecessary by the availability of volunteers from south of the border.

The willingness of these young preachers to enter into the Canadian mission, enduring great hardships to do so, is most impressive. Wakeley, in his *Heroes of Methodism*, tells how in 1794 three preachers made their way from Albany by rowboat all the way to Kingston. It took nineteen days, during which they slept in a house only once, though they had rain and snow fifteen days out of nineteen. The spiritual destitution of the frontier communities made an irresistible claim upon the hearts of the young preachers

¹⁵ *The Life and Times of Anson Green* (Toronto: Methodist Book Room, 1877), p. 63.

¹⁶ G. F. Playter, *The History of Methodism in Canada* (Toronto: Green, 1862), p. 30.

in Canada as elsewhere. A lack of spiritual leadership was one of the hardships of the pioneer situation. In Upper Canada by the year 1800 there were only eighteen or nineteen ministers, although the population by then numbered more than 25,000. Of these ministers three were Anglican, four Baptist, four Presbyterian or Reformed, and one Roman Catholic. The Methodists had six, and with their superior number of workers and their more intensive and extensive cultivation of the field, they were making steady gains.

Applying the Methodist System

The success of Methodism in propagating religion in frontier regions is due in large part to the distinctive Methodist system. Where the system worked well it provided a steady supply of preachers, carefully supervised and constantly on the move around their extensive circuits. In most cases the circuit riders were posted to a different circuit each year. This ensured a continuity and variety of ministry unmatched by any other denomination.

In an earlier article it was shown that the mission to Nova Scotia failed to make the headway it ought to have done, largely because the Methodist itinerant system could not be properly implemented. The contrast between that experience and what took place in Canada is instructive.

The period from 1790 to 1812 may be broken down for convenience into four stages of growth. The first stage, from 1790 to 1795, is the pioneer period in Upper Canada, when the first three circuits were established and the number of preachers on the field rose from one to three. The second stage, from 1795 to 1801, was marked by consolidation of the work in Upper Canada and the pioneer stage of work in Lower Canada near the United States border. From five to seven preachers were working in Canada each year during this period. Stage three, from 1801 to 1807, witnessed growth in Upper Canada, consolidation of the U.S. border area of Lower Canada, and pioneer work in Montreal. The number of preachers travelling in this period rose from ten to sixteen. From 1808 to 1812 the number of itinerants in the field rose from nineteen to twenty-one, and this fourth stage was marked by consolidation of the work in Lower Canada, opening up of work in Quebec, and further growth in Upper Canada.

Over this period of twenty-one years the Methodist Episcopal Church placed seventy-two itinerants in the Canadian mission field. These travelling preachers carried out a total of two hundred and fifty-four man-years of service, an average of about three and a half years per man. The result of this sustained effort may be measured in terms of church membership figures. The figures for 1812 are not available because of wartime conditions, but we have

the 1811 returns of 3,327 members in the Canadian societies.

This figure may be divided by the number of man-years of work to give us a rough index of productivity. They yield a figure of 13.3 members per man-year of work. This compares with an index of productivity of 9.4 in the Nova Scotia mission, and this differential provides a clear indication of the greater relative effectiveness of the work in the Canadian provinces, which in turn may be attributed to the continuity of leadership provided by the Methodist Conferences in the latter case.

The role of the Conference in the Canadian mission was of the utmost importance. From the start of the work in Canada the missionaries were regarded as working within the jurisdiction of the American Methodist Conference. Even when it took them a month or more to travel from the Canadian frontier to their Conference meetings in Philadelphia or New York, the itinerants were expected to attend, to give an account of themselves, and to receive instructions for their next year's work.

Up to 1796 there were no conference boundaries, but with the steady growth of Methodism it became necessary to set up regional conferences. The intention was to make it easier to maintain close contact between the Conference and the preachers, but the effect on the Canadian work was rather confusing, especially as circuits in lower Canada tended to get switched from the New England to the New York Conference and back again. The Essex circuit, set up in 1799, "embraced the whole tract of country lying between Lake Champlain and the Green Mountains, and extending from the Onion River in Vermont Northward some twenty or thirty miles into Canada."¹⁷ The first preacher appointed to this three hundred mile circuit was the eccentric Lorenzo Dow. After some months of good work, Dow was suddenly seized by the impulse to visit Britain. He abandoned his circuit and sailed away from Quebec. To fill the vacancy a promising young exhorter named Elijah Hedding was sent in to supply for a few months. In 1801 Hedding was appointed to the Plattsburg circuit under Elijah Chichester. This circuit on the west side of Lake Champlain also ran up into Canada, nearly to St. John's.

The first visit to Montreal by a Methodist minister was in 1802, when Joseph Sawyer went there from Upper Canada. He was cordially received by a few persons who had belonged to the Methodist society in New York City, who helped him to secure a school room for preaching. Sawyer paid a courtesy call on the local Anglican clergyman, only to be rebuffed. "I would much

¹⁷ D. W. Clark, *The Life and Times of Rev. Elijah Hedding* (New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1855), p. 75.

rather encourage the Roman Catholics than such as you, Dissenters," declared the rector, "Get out of my sight."¹⁸

In 1803 Elijah Chichester and Laban Clark were designated missionaries to St. John and Sorel in Lower Canada. Chichester, having no success, went to Montreal to fill out his year. Clark gave up at year's end and left the field.¹⁹ In 1806 William Snyder was appointed missionary to the French. In 1807 two other circuits, Dunham and Stanstead, were formed in Lower Canada within the New England Conference.

These instances illustrate the peculiar difficulties encountered in Lower Canada, the overextended circuits, the small numbers of English-speaking people, the resistance of the French culture to evangelical penetration, and the hostile posture of the Anglicans. The division of responsibility for the Canadian work between two Conferences also tended to lessen the impact of the Methodist mission in the Lower province. As a result the gains made were less than spectacular. In Upper Canada, however, the gains were continuous and the prospects encouraging.

Bishop Asbury realized in 1810 that the time had come to set up a new Annual Conference in the North. He set off the Genesee Conference to include two districts in Western New York and one in Upper Canada. In 1812, on Asbury's motion, the Lower Canada district was added to the Genesee Conference.²⁰ The latter district included some circuits in Upper Canada as well as Montreal and Quebec, but it did not include the circuits south of the St. Lawrence River, which remained attached to the New York and New England Conferences.

For the Canadian work, especially in Upper Canada, the erection of the Genesee Conference was a great advantage. After its first meeting Asbury wrote:

Our Genesee Conference exceeded by far our greatest expectations . . . Canadians generally attended conference, commands 600 miles at least in length, 200 in width, 400 miles from former seats of conferences held in York and Pennsylvania. It promised to cure evils . . . such as preachers being four months absent, spending 20 dollars in going to conference and losing the time.²¹

Between the annual meetings of the Conferences there was continuing supervision of the preachers by a senior minister in each district with the title of Presiding Elder. The Canadian mission was ably led by two men who lived and worked in Upper

¹⁸ John Carroll, *Past and Present* (Toronto: Alfred Dredge, 1860), p. 24.

¹⁹ Playter, *Methodism in Canada*, p. 77.

²⁰ *Journals of General Conferences*, I, p. 116.

²¹ Asbury, *Journal and Letters*, III, p. 435.

Canada for many years, Henry Ryan and William Case. To the untiring labors and evangelical zeal of these two Presiding Elders belongs much credit for the steady advance of the Methodist cause in Canada.

Francis Asbury, the Bishop and the organizing genius of the Methodist Episcopal Church, had consistently supported the venture into Canada. He had seen to it that a steady supply of preachers flowed into the northern field. But he had never been in Canada himself until twenty-one years after William Losee first crossed the St. Lawrence. Finally in July of 1811, after the New England Conference, Asbury and his companion, Henry Boehm, made their way on horseback through the Green Mountains of Vermont, crossed Lake Champlain, rode through the swamps of the Chateaugay woods, and came to the St. Lawrence River at St. Regis. Here they were ferried across the river in canoes by Mohawk Indians.²²

The Bishop was warmly received by the Methodist people. Though suffering greatly from inflammatory rheumatism in his foot, the aging Bishop preached at several places, and in Kingston conducted a communion service in the new chapel. He was unable, however, to meet an appointment at the Hay Bay Church, and Henry Boehm preached there in his stead. The Quinte circuit at that time reported only 655 members, but Boehm found an audience of two thousand people gathered under the trees to hear him preach on the Lord's Day, July 14.²³

Asbury mentions that he had conversations with members of several of the families once associated with the John Street Society in New York. He was attracted to the people he met. Of the "German settlement" where the Hecks lived he wrote, "Here is a decent, loving people; my soul is much united to them." He was also favorably impressed by the country,

One of the finest countries I have ever seen: the timber is of a noble size: the cattle are well-shaped and well-looking: the crops are abundant, on a most fruitful soil: surely this is a land that God the Lord hath blessed.²⁴

The brief visit soon came to an end. Asbury and Boehm, hastening to the inaugural meeting of the Genesee Conference, left Kingston by ship on July 15 for Sackett's Harbour, New York. The Bishop wrote in his *Journal*:

Well, I have been in Canada, and find it like all stations in the extremities—there are difficulties to overcome, and prospects to cheer

²² Egerton A. Ryerson, *Canadian Methodism* (Toronto: Briggs, 1882), p. 36n.

²³ Henry Boehm, *Reminiscences*, p. 355.

²⁴ Asbury, *Journal and Letters*, II, p. 677.

us. Some of our Labourers have not been so faithful and diligent as we could wish.

Revivalism

The whole Methodist movement in America was concerned with the conversion of sinners and winning them to a life of holiness. For this reason it was constantly engaged in promoting a revival. When the Great Revival broke out in the southwest at the turn of the century, it made popular a new form of religious meeting, the outdoor camp meeting. Asbury was quick to assess the pros and cons of this type of activity, and he encouraged his preachers to introduce it in other parts of the country.

Joseph Jewell, who had been Presiding Elder in the Upper Canada District and returned to the United States in 1803, presided at the first camp meeting held in the State of New York. This was held at Geneva Lake in the summer of 1805. In August of the same year the first camp meeting in Canada was held at Ancaster.²⁵ Another was held at Hay Bay in September, led by Henry Ryan and William Case. John Carroll observes that three-quarters of all the accessions to Methodist membership that year were from Case's circuit, where the camp meeting was held.²⁶

Nathan Bangs was present at the Hay Bay meeting and regarded it in the light of later reflection as a salient fact in the history of Canadian Methodism.²⁷ Bangs' account vividly describes how the event opened on a Friday afternoon with 250 persons present. A speakers' stand was set up at the front, with log seats on the ground. Singing, prayers, two sermons and exhortations filled the afternoon. A break of an hour and a half for supper was followed by a prayer meeting. Then came singing, preaching and exhorting until midnight, the crowd continuing to grow. At five o'clock Saturday morning a prayer meeting was held. At ten a sermon was preached on the text, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." By now the crowd had grown to 2,500. Bangs felt an unusual sense of the divine presence, and noted that the audience felt it also. Behind the seated congregation was a circle of standees, and these had begun to draw back. Leaping to his feet, Bangs went down into the crowd, followed by other preachers, to exhort and comfort those who were showing signs of distress. God's people were urged to gather about those who were weeping and groaning, and to pray for them. A dozen little praying circles formed. The meeting continued all night.

²⁵ Arthur Kewley established this fact from Benjamin Smith's Diary. See *Canadian Journal of Theology*, Vol. X, No. 3, 1964.

²⁶ Carroll, *Case and His Contemporaries* (Toronto: Rose, 1867-77), I, pp. 113-118.

²⁷ Abel Stevens, *The Life of Nathan Bangs* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1863), p. 150.

Sunrise on Sunday was greeted with songs of thanksgiving. After breakfast, the crowd now being even larger, a love-feast was held. The excitement was so great that not all could hear the preacher on the stand, so another preacher spoke from a wagon at some distance to a second crowd. At noon the Lord's Supper was administered to multitudes, while many more looked on. The meeting continued through the day, and it was dark when the crowds broke away and began to leave for their homes, with the sound of singing along the roads under the stars.

Few of the more bizarre phenomena reported from the revivals in Kentucky appeared in the Canadian camp meetings, though it was usual for people to weep freely, to groan or shout. The camp meeting continued as a favored type of revival program during the good weather for upwards of twenty years, making important contributions to the spread and deepening of religion. But camp meetings were by no means the only effective means of winning converts. The quarterly meetings held on each circuit over a week-end frequently drew large crowds and generated equal fervor.

The Methodists did not count their gains by a mere tally of converts at the altar of the revival meeting. They paid more attention to the number who were added to the weekly Methodist class meetings and to the Society as a result. The Methodist system was better equipped to support and nourish the new convert than most other religious groups.

Nathan Bangs, whose judgment commanded respect, maintained that the methods of revival in this phase of Methodist history were more than justified by the net gain in the cause of religion. In the first issue of the *New York Christian Advocate*, September 9, 1826, he editorialized,

If the Methodist Church in America has increased beyond any parallel during one-fourth of a century past, we must ascribe much of her spiritual prosperity, under God, to the blessed influence of such meetings.

While this evaluation was probably correct, it was made at a time when the effectiveness and the role of the camp meetings were already on the wane. Other forms of evangelization were built into the Methodist system, and these continued to be effectual.

The Crisis of 1812

Up to this point the mission on the Canadian frontier had been making steady and satisfactory progress. In most respects its development paralleled that experienced elsewhere by Methodist expansion into frontier regions. The distinctive political and social conditions in the British colony had not proved a barrier to the development of the mission work. Twenty-one years of faithful

ministry had laid the foundation for a further great advance.

This promising situation was subjected to a major disruption by the onset of war in 1812. The progress of the church was still heavily dependent on the aid of preachers from the United States, and this aid was effectively cut off by the War of 1812. Frontier communities were disrupted, ravaged and impoverished by the invasion of American troops. The normal pursuits of rural life were in disarray as men were called up for service in the militia to defend their land.

The object of the war was to strike a blow at the British, and it was expected in Washington that this would be easily accomplished by liberating the Canadians from their oppressive colonial rulers. John Melish had written: "If 5,000 men were sent into the Province with a proclamation of independence the great mass of people would join the American government."²⁸ General Hull was of the same opinion when he invaded Canada from Detroit in July, 1812, and issued a proclamation calling on the populace to rejoice in their deliverance. The response was unexpected. The people did not rise. A swift counter-stroke by a small force under General Brock brought about a hasty retreat, and Hull surrendered Detroit without a fight.

The Americans were unable to win any decisive victories, though their raids created havoc in the countryside. Settlements which had just begun to get on their feet were so devastated that they had to start all over again. The net result in Canada when the time of peace finally arrived has been summed up by Edgar McInnes, the Canadian historian:

The War of 1812 left behind it deep scars, which have never wholly disappeared . . . In Canada . . . the war was looked on as a wanton aggression, which had been motivated by vindictiveness and rapacity and which was only too likely to be repeated at the next opportunity. The result was a potent stimulus to an incipient Canadian nationalism. . . . One consequence was a serious increase in hostility toward Americanism and everything it implied.²⁹

The effects of the war on the activities of the church were disastrous. Most of the Methodist travelling preachers, being American citizens, were obliged to withdraw from the country. Those who remained in Canada found it necessary in most cases to locate, in other words to give up the circuit-riding program and settle in one spot where they might eke out a sustenance by farming and still do some part-time preaching. Services were still held as conditions permitted, with the help of these local preachers and

²⁸ Melish, *Travels in the United States . . . and Upper Canada*, (Philadelphia: 1812), p. 69.

²⁹ McInnes, *Canada*, p. 198.

any lay leaders who could assist. Not even all of the able-bodied local preachers were available for this work, for at least three of them entered military service on the Canadian side.³⁰

Throughout this period when no communication was possible between Canadian Methodists and the Genesee Conference, even the distinguished Presiding Elder William Case found it necessary to remain in the States, and Nathan Bangs, who had been appointed Presiding Elder of the Lower Canada District, was unable to take up that post. The one man who held the work in Canada together during that trying time was the redoubtable Presiding Elder Henry Ryan. Under his leadership a conference of local preachers was held in the Province and arrangements made to supply the Methodist appointments in the best manner the circumstances would permit.

For two and a half years the Canadian work was not reported in the *Minutes of the Annual Conferences*, as the information was not available. By the end of the war the membership in the Canadian Methodist societies had been cut almost in half. With the movement in such a crippled condition it would require heroic measures and immense tact to build it up once more. In this new situation the American Methodist Church would have to deal with unprecedented problems. It is to their credit that they did not back away from the responsibilities they had assumed by entering the Canadian field in 1791. How they dealt with the new situation will be the subject of a later article.

³⁰ Locating were: Cooper, Reynolds, Hopkins, Gatchell, Smith, Holmes, Burdick, Covenhoven, and Densmore. Preachers in military service were Smith Griffin, Henry Cline, Peter Bowslaugh. Sanderson, *Methodism in Canada*, I, pp. 71f.