



DISCOVERY

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KENT/HYNSON CHAPEL, KENT COUNTY, MARYLAND

In 1774, at the beginnings of Methodist activities on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, a Methodist society erected a chapel. Located between Chestertown and Rock Hall, the chapel was one of three Methodist places of worship in the Peninsula. Originally known as Old Kent Meetinghouse,¹ it was soon changed to Hinson Chapel.² It was the first Methodist chapel in the bounds of the Peninsula Conference of The Methodist Church. At the time of the American Revolution, it was the only Methodist house of worship on the Peninsula,³ and Francis Asbury was the only English Methodist remaining in America.

John Lednum recorded the presence of several Methodist preaching appointments: at Werton, Bohemia Manor, at a schoolhouse, and fourth at "Mr. Hinson's." Kent Chapel was built in the face of opposition. Lednum noted:

Just when the timbers were prepared for raising the house, some wicked persons, out of hatred to the cause, came by night and cut up a part of the frame and carried it some distance and burned it. This act of malevolence did not stop the work; the friends of the cause rallied, and the house was set up. It has been called 'Hinson's Chapel.'⁴

In its earliest stages, the home of Mr. Hinson⁵ was a preaching appoint-

¹*The Journals and Letters of Francis Asbury I* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), 73 n. 24.

²Originally spelled 'Hinson', by the turn of the century the spelling had changed to 'Hynson'.

³William H. Williams, *The Garden of American Methodism: The Delaware Peninsula, 1769-1820* (Dover: The Peninsula Conference, 1984), 60.

⁴John Lednum, *A History of the Rise of Methodism in America* (Philadelphia: John Lednum, 1859), 126-27.

ment along with those at Werton, Bohemia Manor, and more. By 1773, a society had been formed at Hinson's, and Asbury preached there on September 23.⁶ After an absence of four years, Asbury returned to Hinson's people there, traveled to Judge White's, and returned to Hinson's at Christmas 1777, preaching from John 1:45-46.⁷

After a twenty-year's pilgrimage from New England to Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia, Asbury returned to the Peninsula, speaking at the "new, neat chapel in Kent." His sermon was "long and laboured." He wrote, "I visited Carvill Hinson: after a twenty-years' separation, we who were left were comforted in God together."⁸

Another prominent preacher to the Peninsula was Freeborn Garretson, who began preaching at Hynson's Chapel in June 1778. Lednum recorded the violent response of the enemies of Methodism, "Here the Methodists had many friends; and, we may add, the people of this county never so violently persecuted the preachers."

Advised by friends to avoid danger, Garretson's spirit constrained him to preach God's Word. He traveled unhindered into Cecil County, Maryland, and into Delaware, but on returning to Queen Anne's County (next to Caroline and Talbot Counties), he was threatened, then beaten into unconsciousness by a certain John Brown. At first, Brown was very fearful, while Garretson was exhorting Brown to repentance. However, as soon as the preacher was out of danger, Brown sought his imprisonment. As Garretson urged him to know his sin, the charge was dropped, the magistrate was offered Christ, and soon thereafter, Garretson preached the magistrate's wife's funeral.⁹

In 1802, the venerable Henry Boehm, son of Martin Boehm, a founder of the United Brethren in Christ Church, was appointed to Kent Circuit. "I had the honor of preaching in Kent's Meetinghouse, the first Methodist house of worship erected on the Eastern Shore of Maryland." He noted that the chapel was later replaced and was now called "'Hynson's Chapel,'" from the name of a family who resided near it".¹⁰ Henry Boehm later became the traveling companion of Asbury.

The Hynsons had a history in Maryland from earlier years. Thomas

⁵This was Carvil Hinson, who gave hospitality to Asbury when Asbury was leaving Maryland for Judge White's in Whiteleysburg, Delaware, to avoid an oath of loyalty to Maryland during the American Revolution. See Asbury I, 89 n. 65. White paid a price for his loyalty, being seized and examined as an enemy to the colonies. Lednum, 208-209.

⁶Asbury, I, 94.

⁷Asbury I, 253-255; Lednum, 208.

⁸Asbury, II, 498-499 (March 26, 1806).

⁹Lednum, 214-215.

¹⁰J. B. Wakeley, *Reminiscences of Rev. Henry Boehm* (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1875), 75-76. There was also a cemetery which held the remains of the distinguished Methodist preacher, William Gill, a man whom Dr. Benjamin Rush (1746-1813), the renowned physician and social reformer called "the greatest divine he had ever heard."

Hynson (probably a royalist) arrived in Kent County area in 1650 and settled on a grant of 5,000 acres by the Chesapeake Bay. Devout Anglicans, they worshiped at the "lower church."¹¹ Hynson's Chapel would be erected about one mile from St. Paul's.

Today, the visitor to St. Paul's church yard will find many grave stones marking the Hynson family's presence in Maryland. On the vestryman's board, the original company included four Hynsons. For an extended period of time, the family held an important place among the social elite. They married into important families and held prominent offices.¹²

For a number of years, the author has entertained the thesis that the Hynsons were slaveholders and that the disappearance of his apparent wealth may be traced to the abolition of slavery after the Civil War. One part of the thesis rests upon the existence of a small village, populated entirely by African-Americans, near Denton and Easton, which is named "Hynson." Another piece of evidence is found in William Williams' study, *The Garden of American Methodism*. Williams notes that Thomas Rankin, while traveling through Kent County, Maryland, in 1774, stopped at Carvil Hynson's home. While there, Hynson's wife told Rankin that it had been impossible to keep slaves from stealing everything in sight. But now, thanks to Methodist preaching, slaveholders "could leave every kind of food exposed and none [was] touched by any of them." Later, Tench Tilghman would say that "the best disposed" slaves were "attached to the Methodist Church."¹³ Further, there are numbers of African-Americans on the Shore whose surname is Hynson.

About twenty years ago, the author and his wife, in the company of Paul and Mary Hynson Challenger, saw the estate of the Hynsons, which had remained in the family for 300 years. It had recently been sold for one million dollars. Later in 1995, it was listed again for more than two million dollars.¹⁴

Note: Acknowledgement is made to Professor Allen B. Clark, retired curator of United Methodist Archives for the Peninsula-Delaware Conference located at Barratt's Chapel, for important resources used in this essay.

¹¹Asbury, I, 73.

¹²Two were described as "high sheriffs" in a newspaper history (source unknown).

¹³Williams, 166.

¹⁴The estate is known as Hinchingham. The mansion is about 100 yards from the Bay. Mary Hynson Challenger is the daughter of Dr. Leonard Hynson, a graduate of Dickinson College and Princeton Seminary (1902). For thirty-three years (1902-1935), Leonard was pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Lebanon, Pennsylvania. Born in Henderson, Maryland, on the Eastern Shore (Delmarva), he was a contemporary of my father, Percy, his first cousin. I have a treasured letter from Leonard to my father c. 1957) in my possession.

Through the generosity of the Hynson relationship (which lies in obscurity), the president's home at Washington College is named Hynson-Reingold House. There was no money in my family's coffers, going back to at least the third generation. My great-grandfather (born circa 1860), left one dollar in his will to a son, fifty cents to another child).