Francis Asbury and Thomas White: A Refugee Preacher and His Tory Patron

by James W. May

It was late July in 1777 when British transports bearing General Howe's army sailed out of New York harbor and southward along the New Jersey coast. A few days later the fleet turned into the Chesapeake. On August 24 Francis Asbury, itinerating on the Western Shore, noted in his journal that the report of the British sailing up the Bay had induced many people to leave Annapolis. On the twenty-fifth, Howe's forces began disembarking at the head of the Bay, and Asbury observed the militia "now collecting from all quarters" and wondered how much longer he would be able to preach with a clear conscience. 1

It was not the future bishop's wont to comment on public affairs. His proper business was saving souls, and he preferred to "leave all the little affairs of this confused world to those men to whose province they pertain." After news of the Battle of Lexington reached Baltimore, however, references to England's conflict with her American colonies appeared more frequently in his journal. 2 They reflected not a partisan interest, but a vague sense of approaching judgment, a compassion for those who must suffer, and a dislike of anything that impeded the preaching and the hearing of the Gospel.

He had already resolved, two years earlier, not to return to England. Whatever the consequences, he would not leave his flock in time of danger. He had contemplated the possibility of imprisonment, and he had tasted violence, though escaping unharmed, when an unknown assailant fired into his chaise. Yet it still appeared his duty to remain. 3 More disturbing than threats to his person was the interruption of his mission. With people so inflamed with the martial spirit and preoccupied with preparation for war, congregations became smaller. Increasingly restrictions were being imposed upon the preachers. In Virginia he himself had been quizzed on order of "the committee to examine strangers," and in Maryland he had been fined five pounds for preaching the Gospel. He could not predict the confrontation that might present a compromise wholly unacceptable to his conscience, but he prayed for wisdom sufficient to direct him in "every intricate case." 4

2. Ibid., I. 155, 182, 198, 206.
4. Ibid., I. 162, 166, 180, 190, 234, 235.
To subscribe the Maryland test oath would constitute such a compromise. The universal test oath, which every male inhabitant of the state would be obliged to subscribe before March 1, 1778, contained a commitment to bear arms and to disclose information on persons conspiring or acting against the state.\(^5\) Asbury considered the oath “preposterously rigid.” Perhaps his desire to avoid a confrontation on the issue of subscription lay behind the care with which he began to guard his movements. Leaving the Baltimore circuit in the hands of George Shadford, he changed early in 1777 to Annapolis and the adjacent preaching appointments.\(^6\) The ensuing yearly conference left him without an appointment, and he then ranged at large through several of the Western Shore counties.

Before the end of September Howe defeated Washington’s forces at Brandywine and moved into Philadelphia, and Congress took refuge in Lancaster, later to move to York. Not only was Asbury now caught perilously near to the front lines of conflict; with the imminent departure of his English colleagues he would be alone. He professed reliance upon providence, but his gloomy comments upon the “commotions and troubles” surrounding him betrayed the strain upon his composure.\(^7\)

Why did Asbury decide to cross to the Eastern Shore? Could he believe that on the Peninsula there would be fewer “commotions and troubles” to interfere with his preaching? Was his move a purchase of time for deliberation? Had such friends as the wealthy Baltimore merchant Henry Dorsey Gough and his wife Prudence, both having friends and family connections on the Peninsula, suggested the wisdom of such a move? There is no reason to question Asbury’s later statement that he came to Delaware because that state did not require a test oath of the clergy.\(^8\) We shall note evidence, however, that he had not yet fully decided to establish refuge in Delaware. In retrospect his course might seem clear enough; but it is not likely that he saw things so clearly on December 1 when he recorded:

> I left Mr. Gough’s, and after crossing the Chesapeake, came in safety, at night, to Mr. Cavill Hinson’s; having been absent more than four years, though I was the first of our preachers who carried the Gospel into this neighborhood. My heart was thankful to God for his providential and gracious preservation of me.\(^9\)

Almost two and a half years would elapse before he would leave the Peninsula.


\(^6\) *Journal and Letters*, 1, 229, 231.

\(^7\) *Ibid.*, 1, 250 52.


\(^9\) *Journal and Letters*, 1, 253.
Historians have noted the importance of the Peninsula in the early years of Methodism in America. This was the locale of much of the activity of the earliest itinerants. It was here that, with the British occupation of Philadelphia, persecution of the Methodist preachers reached its height. Into this situation Francis Asbury came in December of 1777 and shortly thereafter took up his abode in the Delaware home of Thomas White. The dramatic events into which the lives of the refugee preacher and his Tory patron were now to be drawn comprise a story meriting a more ample treatment than available heretofore.

Externally, the story records the impact of the shifting military and political situations upon the Methodist movement on the Peninsula, particularly during the crisis occasioned by the occupation of Philadelphia. At a deeper level it portrays the personal crisis from which Asbury emerged as an American, a crisis all the more profound because he insisted upon resolving it in terms of his vocation. Moreover, to set the story in its political and cultural context contributes to a clearer perception of the character of Methodism as it developed under Asbury’s leadership at a time when the sectarian views of the native preachers might have altered more radically the structure and orientation of the movement.

**Disaffection and Religion on the Peninsula**

Asbury had reason to feel safe at Carvill Hinson’s. Four years earlier, while under appointment to Baltimore, he had spent several weeks on the Eastern Shore and had found hospitality at Hinson’s while ill. He was the first Methodist itinerant to preach in the Hinson neighborhood, and here he had organized the first Methodist society in Kent County. Earlier hospitality notwithstanding, he would now learn soon enough that having crossed the Bay he was, if anything, more intimately involved in “comotions and troubles” than he had been on the Western Shore, and that, for reasons peculiar to his new circumstances, he would be even more surely the object of suspicion.

The Peninsula presented maximum exposure to enemy approach by
water. Its irregular coastline, with numerous islands, inlets and estuaries, and its many creeks and rivers, afforded shelter to the tenders of enemy vessels and access to the interior by raiding parties bent upon plunder, harassment, intrigue and recruiting. Swamps and forests provided haven for refugees, deserters and escaped prisoners. Contributing further to political instability in the interior of the Peninsula, a long-continued and only recently settled controversy over the boundary between Delaware and Maryland had bequeathed a legacy of confusion and antagonism related to the jurisdictional question. Moreover, political jurisdiction was divided among three states, and the Chesapeake Bay separated the Virginia and Maryland counties on the Peninsula from their political and administrative centers. The militias, often undermanned and inefficient and not always reliable, could hardly cope with disorder in the more troublesome areas. The security of the Peninsula remained an urgent concern of Congress. Since, of the three states involved, Maryland was the best prepared to take initiative in security matters, it was to Maryland’s government that Congress turned for assistance in enforcing its decisions.

Long before Howe’s fleet entered the Chesapeake, therefore, the Peninsula had been sensitive to threats of attack from without and insurgency from within, and patriots early came to suspect the Church of England clergy as one of the sources of disloyalty. Actually, the Peninsula, save for its extreme upper part, was not invaded by the British armies. But after Lord Dunmore’s invasion of Accomack and Northampton counties in 1775, rumors of imminent invasion and Tory uprisings periodically excited the Peninsula counties.

In the wake of fresh invasion rumors early in 1777 troubles broke out anew, largely in Somerset and Worcester. Congress directed General Smallwood to draw as necessary from continental forces to assist in suppressing the Tory insurgents and assigned a small force under Colonel Richardson to police the disaffected area and build up the militia. The Maryland legislature granted extraordinary powers to the Governor and Council to seize, imprison and relocate the “Inimically disposed.”

12. “Maryland had claimed and actually governed a section of western Kent and a much larger section of western and southern Sussex, but this area finally became a part of the Delaware counties in 1775.” Monroe, Federalist Delaware, pp. 16-17.

13. When Dunmore, Virginia’s last royal governor, invaded the Virginia counties on the Peninsula, the Maryland Convention ordered minute-companies in Dorchester, Queen Anne’s and Kent to march to the assistance of the Virginia patriots. Peter Force, comp., American Archives... (Washington, 1837-1853), 4th series, IV, 753.


Smallwood suspected that the “finishing stroke” had yet to be put to the business in Somerset and Worcester. His observations shed light on the state of affairs on the Eastern Shore when Asbury arrived there at the end of the year. The general was convinced that all measures “to Protect the Whigs and secure the Tories” in Somerset and Worcester would prove unavailing unless similar security measures should be taken “in the Delaware State, such is their Confidence in each other, from their communication and Vicinity, and from their particular situation and intercourse with the British Navy.” Disaffection was widespread and deeply ingrained. He knew of “few circles of the like Extent in New York or the Jersey State which abound more in Disaffected people.” 16

Smallwood went on to probe the roots of disaffection. He was convinced “that Religion was the original cause of those Events.” Appeal to religion was to be discovered “as the Principle motive in every Instance, tho there are some Exceptions wherein Ignorant men from the Religious Attachment have been deluded...yet by far the greater number conceal their true motives and make Religion a Cloak for their nefarious Designs.” 17

Had General Smallwood named a clergyman, he might have pointed to the Reverend John Bowie of Worcester. Bowie was one of the fourteen persons specifically excluded from the generous amnesty terms offered the insurgents by the Maryland General Assembly. He was required to give bond for two thousand pounds and to move to the Western Shore. 18 The general might also have mentioned the Reverend John Scott of Somerset county, who earlier had been declared a dangerous influence. Scott was placed under bond and required to move to Frederick county. 19 Another irksome clergyman was the Reverend John Patterson of Kent County (Maryland), who two years earlier had been censured by the Maryland Convention. When Howe’s fleet appeared in the Chesapeake, Patterson was again placed under guard, and William Paca wrote to Governor Johnson from Chestertown: “I herewith send you a most incorrigible fellow the Reverend John Patterson: he has been endeavoring to throw every

---

16. Ibid., XVI, 175. Maryland’s Governor Johnson reported to Congress that conditions in Sussex, Delaware’s southernmost county, were worse than those in Worcester and Somerset. Ibid., XVI, 222. For Delaware’s efforts to deal with the Sussex Loyalists in early 1777 see Harold Bell Hancock, The Delaware Loyalists (Wilmington, 1940), pp. 56-57. Hancock concluded that four-fifths of the population of Sussex were loyalist, and that half of all the Delaware population were opposed to independence.

17. Archives of Maryland, XVI, 173.


19. Force, comp., American Archives, 4th series, III, 1586; 5th series, I, 1343; III, 96-97, 123; Archives of Maryland, XII, 118, 328. Scott was Governor Eden’s chaplain.
Obstacle in the way of calling forth our militia, and has violated the execution of our Laws; he is the most exasperating mortal that ever existed." This time the Council placed Patterson in the custody of the Sheriff of Baltimore County.

Thus had the authorities dealt with three clergymen within the year. Even if John Wesley's Toryism had not been known in the colonies, and if the Methodists had not been identified with the Church of England, Francis Asbury would have been under suspicion on the Eastern Shore in December of 1777. But yet more damaging associations remained to cloud his coming. Some of his fellow Methodists had already proved as incorrigible and exasperating as the Reverend Mr. Patterson, and — inasmuch as they were not subject to the same public scrutiny as the parish clergy — more dangerous. To his letter complaining to Governor Johnson of Patterson's behavior William Paca added:

> I am sorry to inform you of an Insurrection of Tories on the Borders of Queen Ann's and Caroline Counties headed by some scoundrel Methodist Preachers. A Body of eighty assembled in arms, were dispersed, three have since been apprehended. The Captain and Chief Methodist Preacher are among the Captives. Colonel Richardson remains in Caroline County to suppress those that are assembled.

"The Captain and Chief Methodist Preacher" was Martin Rodda, one of Wesley's missionaries. General Howe, upon landing his forces, issued a proclamation assuring security and protection to peaceable inhabitants of the Peninsula and promising pardon to armed rebels who would "return to their due allegiance." Rodda was circulating Howe's petition on his circuit. The extent of his complicity in the "armed insurrection" and the identity of the other preachers is not established. But the readiness of Paca to identify the leaders as "scoundrel Methodist Preachers" is significant. Rodda was said to have taken refuge on board a British ship and to have

22. Twelve days after Paca reported Rodda's arrest, Mordecai Gist wrote to Governor Johnson: "I enclose you Martin Rodda's Parole, the charge against him was forwarded to the Lieutenant of Kent county in order to be transmitted to you." *Archives of Maryland*, XVI, 378.
24. The Eastern Shore was perhaps the principal area of persecution of Methodists. We shall deal later with the cases of Joseph Hartley and Freeborn Garrettson. Ezekiel Cooper, himself a native of Caroline County, also mentioned Caleb Pedicord, Thomas Chew and Joseph Foster among the "suffering brethren" who were "mulct or fined, and thrown into costs" or imprisoned. Cooper admitted that a few of the preachers "gave too much cause for suspicions." See *Funeral Discourse*, pp. 81-85.
made his way eventually to Philadelphia and thence to England. 25

Rodda was one of the four preachers appointed to the Kent circuit in the spring of 1777. Kent, the only circuit on the Peninsula, embraced an indefinite area extending generally from Elkton, Maryland, to Cedar Creek below present-day Milford, Delaware. Two years after Asbury's earlier visit the Methodist conference for the first time appointed a preacher to Kent circuit. When Rodda and his three associates were appointed to Kent, the circuit had reported 720 persons "in society." Now, within a week after his arrival, Asbury wrote: "I am persuaded that my appointment to this circuit is by Divine Providence." 26 His optimism seems to us naive. With the British occupying Philadelphia and Washington encamped at Valley Forge both armies would vie for access to what supplies could be found on the Peninsula. After the British reduced American defenses on the Delaware their vessels enjoyed relatively free passage along both east and west coasts. Security measures were tightened. General Smallwood, commanding continental and militia elements in the Wilmington area, was charged with cutting off supplies to Philadelphia and protecting the counties below from incursions of the British. Possibly Asbury believed he might repair some of the damage wrought by Rodda's indiscretions. Perhaps he was encouraged by the larger and more attentive congregations he found on the Eastern Shore. There seemed "a much greater prospect of doing good in this circuit than in some others." Indeed, "if Providence should permit," he might even remain through the winter. 27

Asbury's optimism would prove short-lived. But in the meantime he continued to travel and preach, although his caution in recording names and places, together with the gaps in his journal, prevent a sure tracing of his movements. For two months he traveled in both Maryland and Delaware. In January he appeared to move on the course of a prospective circuit, northward through Kent and Cecil counties, then down into all three Delaware counties. In that same month, however, entries more foreboding found place in his journal. After a service in Kent County

25. Ambrose Serle, secretary of General Howe, attended church in New Castle on October 18, 1777, and commented on the "odd kind of motley Service of Religion." "The Parson, one [Aeneas] Ross, read the Liturgy, garbled of the Prayers for the King & Royal Family, after which, one of Mr. Wesley's Preachers mounted the Pulpit, and gave us a long and full Prayer for the King & a Blessing on his Arms and then delivered an extemporary Oration, which, the author being evidently illiterate, was for the matter and manner curious enough." The American Journal of Ambrose Serle, ed. Edward H. Tatum, Jr. (San Marino, 1940), p. 252. Could this unidentified preacher have been Rodda?


“two men in arms came up, but they went away without making known their design.” When he crossed back into Maryland at the end of the month, his words conveyed unmistakably a sense of crisis: “Dark prospects, in temporal matters, present themselves to my view.” Then, following three days without an entry: “Troubles stare me in the face; but I have confidence towards God, and...will leave all events to Him.” He crossed again into Delaware, and, preaching as he went, stopped at the home of Thomas White. For the next few months the lives of White and the Methodist itinerant to whom he extended hospitality were to be dramatically intertwined. 28

**Thomas White and the Dover “Insurrection”**

Thomas White was one of the justices of the common court of pleas and orphans court of Kent county (Delaware). He possessed considerable estate and was a friend of numerous men in the public life of the state. 29 Asbury’s first reference to White in his journal was on December 11, 1777. Within a month of his arrival at Carvill Hinson’s he made at least two visits to White’s home near Whiteleysburg. Although he reported these visits casually, one may reasonably assume that the two men discussed Asbury’s eventual move to Delaware and the possibility of a temporary residence in the White home. Many years later Asbury referred to “my patron, good and respectable Thomas White, who promised me security and secrecy.” 30 White was fifteen years older than Asbury. The friendship of the two men continued until White’s death, and the Delaware judge’s hospitality to the future bishop caused his name to be honored in the Methodist’s accounts of the times of persecution. 31

Several considerations could have figured in Asbury’s choice of White’s home as a place of refuge. In the first place White, a communicant of the Church of England, had become a Methodist. Moreover, within sight of his home stood the residence of his nephew, Dr. Edward White, who, according to Henry Boehm, was responsible for his uncle’s joining the...


29. The more readily accessible material on Thomas White has been that included in articles on his more prominent son or in the filial accounts of early Methodist writers. Of the former type are George H. Ryden’s sketch of Samuel White in *DAB* and the earlier paper by Henry C. Conrad, *Samuel White and His Father Judge Thomas White*, Papers of the Historical Society of Delaware XL (Wilmington, 1903). Early Methodist writers depended upon Asbury and Cooper. Conrad records that Judge White by his will provided for liberation of all his slaves.


31. Learning of White’s death in 1795, Asbury wrote movingly of “one among my best friends in America... a friend to the poor and oppressed... His house and heart were always open; and he was a faithful friend to liberty in spirit and in practice...” *Journal and Letters*, II, 50.
Methodists. 32 The figure of Mrs. White, a woman “of ardent piety,” also persisted in the memories of early Methodists, particularly with respect to her hospitality toward the preachers. Martin Rodda was the first of the Wesleyan itinerants to come to the Whites. 33

The location of the White home, in a heavily forested area near the Maryland border, afforded relative isolation from larger settlements and the more frequently traveled roads and waterways. At the same time it was accessible from all directions and within easy reach of Methodist work already opened up in the Eastern Shore counties. White’s farm lay in that strip on the western edge of Kent county formerly claimed by Maryland. In marked contrast with New Castle county on the north, Kent and Sussex were generally conservative in character. 34

A further, and perhaps the most important, consideration recommending White to Asbury derived from White’s political alignment. Even though Asbury eschewed political activity, the political orientation of his host would — or so it might have seemed — afford him security. White was identified with the cautious, conservative faction in Delaware politics which a year earlier, as heirs of the old proprietary or court party, had taken over control of the state government from the more radical leaders supporting independence. What was more, he was one of the principals in the “Enterprise...against Dover,” which the Whig writer “Timoleon” called “the first insurrection in Delaware.” 35

Though frustrated in the Dover “insurrection,” the Tories quickly won control of the new state government formed after the endorsement of independence. What Asbury may not have understood when he came to White’s was that Tory control was already weakening, and that he had found shelter in the home of a minor Tory magistrate at the very time that Whigs were returning to power. The great importance of this transition for both Judge White and his guest requires a summary of events in Delaware politics between May 1776 and March 1778.


34. “Just as New Castle County with its bustling commercial life, its numerous travelers, and its Scotch-Irish, Presbyterian population developed into a hot-bed of patriotism, lower Delaware with its backward, rural population, its strong Episcopal Church and its isolation emerged the stronghold of the loyalists.” Hancock, Delaware Loyalists, p. 4.

Congress recommended in May 1776 that the states establish governments “sufficient to the exigencies of their affairs.” A few weeks later the Delaware Assembly complied, but not before a period of acrimonious controversy during which lines were clearly drawn between Whigs and Tories that would continue throughout the war.36 During the two weeks preceding the Assembly’s vote to suspend government under the crown, debate gave way to violence, first in Kent and then in Sussex.

According to Thomas Rodney, the Kent County Committee of Inspection met in Dover to consider instructions to the county’s assembly members as to how they should vote on the question of independence. A company of militia were in Dover: and while the committee debated, from three in the afternoon until nine in the evening, “A good Many Officers” and “Many hundreds of the people from the Country” milled in the streets. The committee at length approved instructions supporting an independent government and thereupon adjourned. Before all the committee left, however, Thomas White returned to report “that some Members of the Committee...were seized by the people.” Rodney, who was in command of the infantry, ran out to find “the people in a great crowd moving near towards the stocks or whipping post.” The mob seized John Clarke, a Tory justice of the peace who in the committee debate vigorously opposed the formation of an independent government. Before Rodney could rescue him Clarke was pilloried and pelted with eggs. Rodney then “returned to the Committee room again and found the Members had all fled.” Clarke and White went to the home of Richard Bassett, captain of the light horse, and the three of them “Concerted the Insurrection that soon followed.” 37

“In a few days” Clarke, in company with White, marched “some hundreds” of armed followers on Dover. North of the town a company of light horse associated under disaffected officers waited to join the insurgents. On the preceding evening, however, word of the expected attack came to Rodney as commander of the infantry in Dover.

Richard Bassett was Taken in his bed in the Morning and laid under parole All the Ammunition was seized upon and every suspected person put Under Guard — ‘Till the Insurgents sent a deputation desiring that all Matters Might be Accomodated whereupon Rodney... went out to their camp... and there Agreed with Clarke and White that If they would depart home peacebly and remain quiet in future that they should not be molested whereupon they all departed with great Joy.

Insurrection also flared in Sussex, and serious enough for Congress to send in troops. Thomas Rodney and his followers — the “patriotic or in other words independent party” — accused Kent Tories of complicity in

36. Ibid., p. 12.
37. On Richard Bassett, prominent and wealthy Methodist, see Robert E. Pattison, The Life and Character of Richard Bassett, Papers of the Historical Society of Delaware XXIX (Wilmington, 1900); Lednum, Rise of Methodism pp. 272-78. It was through his relationship with Thomas White that Bassett came to know Asbury.
the Sussex uprisings and called for an investigation. In the meantime, however, the Assembly, having formally endorsed the Declaration of Independence, ordered election of delegates to a constitutional convention, and Tories won all ten places in the Kent county delegation. White, Bassett and Clarke were on the victorious Tory ticket. The new constitution was proclaimed in September, and another Tory victory came with the election of members of the new Assembly. The Assembly proceeded to designate three conservatives to represent the state in Congress and appointed judges as required by the new constitution. One of the latter was Thomas White.

It was not until February 1777 that the Assembly chose the first president of the state. He was John McKinly, a conservative and, some believed, not an unwilling captive when the British later took him prisoner and brought him to Philadelphia. Outwardly Delaware had complied with the wishes of Congress. Patriots in Dover celebrated independence in the town square and consigned the King's portrait to their bonfire. But within the state and beyond it men now committed to the revolution saw in Delaware's new order but a continuation of the old.

**The Whigs Return to Power**

When the British invaded New Castle county and then occupied Philadelphia, which long had been the political, cultural and commercial center of the "Three Lower Counties," Delaware began to view the war with Britain from a different perspective. The new outlook was reflected in the October election, when New Castle and Sussex chose radical representatives to the Assembly and a moderate slate won in Kent. In December two liberals, Thomas McKean and Caesar Rodney, both of

---


39. The convention convened on August 27, 1776. Thomas White was not recorded as attending any of the sessions. He was "known to be opposed to implementing the resolution of Congress." Hamilton, *Thomas Rodney*, p. 19; *Proceedings of the Convention of the Delaware State Held at New-Castle...* (Wilmington, 1776, Reprint 1927).

40. The judges were "perhaps the worst appointments of the new assembly." Hancock, *Delaware Loyalists*, p. 21.

whom had voted for independence in Philadelphia, were designated to return to the seats they formerly occupied in Congress. At length, with President McKinly still a prisoner in Philadelphia, the General Assembly on March 31, elected Caesar Rodney, the most active general officer of the Delaware militia, president of the state. Although Rodney's election precluded his return to Congress, it presaged a vigorous exertion in behalf of the patriot cause at the state level.

Yet two other factors hastened the recovery of a pro-revolutionary stance in the Delaware government. One was the prodding from Congress, and the other an increasing pressure from the other states, especially Maryland. As the Whig star began to rise over Delaware, Thomas White would feel the impact of both these forces.

Even had they found no other grounds, Whigs on both sides of the state line might have suspected White because of his association with the Methodists. The Eastern Shore already felt convinced of Methodist complicity in Tory conspiracies and was frustrated by the ease with which enemies of the patriot cause crossed the border to evade arrest. With the Methodist circuit extending from the Chesapeake to the Atlantic, Delaware Whigs were suspicious of Methodist involvement in Tory activities in their state. Ezekiel Cooper later recalled that the preachers "had to be very cautious and circumspect; for they were watched, as the hawk watches the partridge on the mountain; and as the wolves watch the sheep of the pasture and the lambs of the flock." To begin with, Asbury's presence actually made of White's home a kind of temporary headquarters for the Methodist movement. Having

42. After returning to Congress, McKean wrote to George Read, Feb. 12, 1778: "The situation of Delaware gives me constant anxiety...and when I learn that not a single step is taken towards collecting the fines under the present inadequate militia law, or to punish the most impudent traitors, or even the harboring of deserters, I despair of any law, tending to support the freedom, independence, and sovereignty of the State, being executed, especially in Kent and Sussex." William Thompson Read, Life and Correspondence of George Read (Philadelphia, 1870), p. 298.

43. See Gov. Johnson to Hancock, Annapolis, April 21, 1777. Archives of Maryland, XVI, 222-223.

44. Caesar Rodney wrote to General Washington just before the battle of Brandywine: "A person Just Come from Kent on Delaware Says, there is a Report there that a Number of Tories on the Borders of that County and Maryland have Embodied, that Some of them are taken, and that it is believed that they were encouraged to it by the Methodists, Many of whose preachers are in that Quarter." C. Rodney to George Washington, Middletown, Sept. 6, 1777. Rodney, Letters, p. 219. General Rodney was apparently misinformed. Nothing further was reported on the insurrection.

45. Funeral Discourse, p. 91.

46. On White's hospitality to the Methodist itinerants see Lednum, Rise of Methodism, pp. 267-72. Lednum, p. 214, attributed White's persecution to his "harboring" Methodist preachers.
formerly served as Wesley's general assistant in America, Asbury would symbolize, at least to some of the Methodists, the continuity of their movement. His journal named four itinerants who visited him at White's during February and March of 1778. He was in correspondence with others. Moreover, in mid-February a quarterly meeting convened at Edward White's barn. Such occasions brought together preachers and society members from the surrounding area for two or more days of preaching, love feasts and matters of general business. Two of the preachers visiting at White's were men of known British sympathies. Samuel Spraggs visited Asbury in March and shortly thereafter passed through the British lines on his way to New York. George Shadford, one of the English missionaries sent out by Wesley, joined Asbury at White's for several weeks before crossing the British lines.

After mid-February Asbury remained in "partial confinement" at White's. Grateful for the "quiet, agreeable family" in which God's providence had placed him, he was resigned "to abide here for a season till the storm is abated." "I want for no temporal convenience, and endeavor to improve my time by devotion and study." A poignant loneliness fell briefly upon him after he bade farewell to Spraggs and Shadford: "... three thousand miles from home — my friends have left me — I am considered by some as an enemy of the country — every day liable to be seized by violence and abused." Word came of the imprisonment of "brother Wrenn" in Annapolis. "But I am strongly persuaded," he wrote, "that Divine Providence will bring about a change before long." For the next few days he made no entry in his journal.

A change was indeed at hand. On March 26 Congress approved a resolution calling for White's arrest:

Congress having great reason to expect an invasion of Delaware, and being apprehensive that the enemy will be assisted or joined by the disaffected there, and con-

47. On the interception of correspondence of suspected clergy see William Stevens Perry, ed., Historical Recollections Relating to the American Colonial Church (Hartford, 1871), II, 481-82.

48. Two days before the meeting began Asbury complained of "too much company." Journal and Letters, I, 262.

49. J. B. Wakely, Lost Chapters Recovered from the Early History of American Methodism (New York, 1858), p. 281, recorded that Spraggs was drawing a salary from Old John Street Church in New York in May.

50. Journal and Letters, I, 260, 262, 263. For a time Asbury and Shadford lived in an outhouse separated from the White home by a stretch of wood. The Whites, according to Lednum, carried meals "in a stealthy manner" to their refugee guests. The Rise of Methodism, p. 204. Shortly after leaving White's, Shadford and a fellow preacher came before General Smallwood seeking a pass through the British lines. Smallwood remarked to them: "Now you have done us all the hurt you can you want to go home!" Peter P. Sanford, comp., Memoirs of Mr. Wesley's Missionaries (New York, 1843), p. 275.

Considering the present condition of that government, and its inability to exercise such powers as are immediately and absolutely necessary for its preservation:

Resolved, nemine contra dicente, That brigadier Smallwood be directed to secure the persons of Thomas White, Charles Gordon, and such other inhabitants of that state as he shall, upon good grounds, suspect to be disaffected, and whose being at large will be dangerous to the independence of these states, and to send them under guard to such a place as he shall think proper.52

On April 2 Asbury recorded: “This night we had a scene of trouble in the family. My friend Mr. Thomas White was taken away, and his wife and family left in great distress of mind.”

Asbury continued four days at White’s. “I was left alone, and spent part of every hour in prayer.” If, he wondered, such things happened to his host, what might he expect for himself, “a fugitive, and an Englishman?” On the fifth day he “found freedom to move.” Riding over “a lonesome, devious road, like Abraham, not knowing whither I went,” he came at length to the home of John Fogwell near Sudlersville, Maryland, some fifteen miles north of the White home.53 Here he remained for three weeks, “in some sense a prisoner, and under the necessity of being concealed, rather than sacrifice the peace of my conscience.” He was made welcome by the family. “I have a private chamber for my asylum, where I comfort myself in God, and spend my time in prayer, meditation and reading.” He was heartened by the reading of “J. Alleine’s Letters, which he wrote in prison.” Yet some days brought disquieting reports. He heard of Joseph Hartley’s arrest in Queen Annes county. On another occasion the spread of a disturbing report led him to “lay in a swamp till about sunset!” I thought myself like some of the old prophets, who were concealed in times of public distress.” He debated “whether to deliver myself into the hands of men, to embrace the first opportunity to depart, or to wait till Providence shall further direct.”54


53. Journal and Letters, I, 265-67. Several writers have identified Fogwell as the friend who gave shelter to Asbury. See Lednum, Rise of Methodism, pp. 115, 162, 206; Hallman, The Garden of Methodism, pp. 12, 282, 322. Asbury’s movements are not to be determined with certainty.

Contention Over a Prisoner

While Asbury awaited the directions of Providence at John Fogwell's, Thomas White remained under detention awaiting resolution of issues reaching beyond his personal situation. His arrest posed delicate questions for the Delaware Whigs, who were now concerned to consolidate their recent gains within the state and to preserve a posture of independence in the face of pressures from Congress and the other states. A letter from Thomas McKean to Caesar Rodney brought succinctly into view the various factors playing upon White's case. McKean, writing four weeks after the light horse patrol took White into custody, set forth the reasons for the arrest. The congressional resolution, McKean explained,

took its rise from a motion of the Delegates of Maryland, founded on an Information given to, and an intercepted letter of Thomas White's laid before the Governor and Council of Maryland, and some kind of claim they had to the persons named, they being lately subjects of that State, living upon their borders and carrying on an iniquitous conspiracy within that State. The intention was to have them imprisoned in Maryland, and to prevent any revenge on the part of these men or their adherents agt the Executive Power of the Delaware State, and also to prevent their being rescued out of our Goals by the Enemy of the Tories, or their being liberated by habeas corpus, as the General Assembly had not suspended the habeas corpus Act.

McKean went on to explain to the Delaware president that the affair had been kept secret "lest the execution of it should be frustrated." He had been asked, he continued, to give the names of "some of the most dangerous men in the State" to be added to the list. "I refused, alledge[sic] the people there were now becoming good Whigs, and I hoped there would be no occasion." 55 McKean reflected the more moderate Whig policy which, where prevailing, would work to White's advantage. Also contributing, indirectly, to his advantage was the tension, produced by his arrest, between Congress and the state of Delaware over the issue of military versus civil authority.

Brought from his home to Dover, White challenged his removal from the state without being informed of the charges against him, and appealed to President Rodney as commander-in-chief for relief. Rodney laid the matter before the upper house of the Assembly, who requested him to order detention of the prisoners pending an inquiry into "the propriety of seizing the persons of those men other than under the authority of the State." White and Gordon then applied to the chief justice for a habeas corpus and obtained it, and the justice requested Rodney to inquire of General Smallwood as to the charges against the prisoners. Smallwood replied that he was not at liberty to divulge the charges and suggested that the legislature apply to Congress for redress "if they conceive the Act to be

an Infringement of their Internal Police." He directed enforcement of the original order and dispatched light horse to escort the prisoners to Wilmington. He also informed Congress of his action and requested their "further direction and pleasure." After the chief justice discharged the prisoners Gordon managed to escape "to the enemies shipping." Smallwood's men presumably took custody of White and brought him to the general's headquarters.

Congress voted approval of Smallwood's conduct and set about preparing a letter to the state of Delaware. Thomas Burke, delegate from North Carolina, observed that only with difficulty were the delegates prevented from ordering Smallwood "to proceed in direct opposition to the habeas corpus, and they forebore this only under an Idea that, approbation of his former conduct would determine him to proceed." The letter that Congress directed its president to edit and transmit to President Rodney was more conciliatory than the version brought in by its committee. The object of the order for White's arrest, the letter explained, was "the security of your State, and the safety of other States."

Congress had received information, on which they rely, that a very great Majority of the Inhabitants of Kent and Sussex and a Part of New Castle, are disaffected, and many of

56. Message of Caesar Rodney to Legislative Council, April 3, 1778; Caesar Rodney to William Smallwood, Dover, April 5, 1778; William Smallwood to Caesar Rodney, Wilmington, April 6, 1778; Caesar Rodney to Henry Laurens, Dover, April 24, 1778, Rodney, Letters, pp. 257-58, 262.

57. Timoleon referred to White as "a man, detained a long time under guard, by General Smallwood, for a well-grounded suspicion of traiterous and treasonable practices." Biographical History, p. 21. Lednum, Rise of Methodism, p. 269, mentioned that Mrs. White learned of the place of her husband's concealment and visited him.

them avowed and bitter Enemies of our Independence. Congress esteem themselves bound in Duty to watch over and to endeavor to preserve the general Welfare: and have heretofore exercised similar powers in the other States without giving any offence.

Only in cases of extreme necessity, the letter assured the Delaware president, would Congress "interfere with the police of any of the States, or lay hands on any of their Subjects." 60

New Fears of Rebellion

Even while Congress prepared its letter to the state of Delaware new reports from both sides of the Maryland-Delaware boundary confirmed the fears of General Smallwood and the delegates at York for the safety of the Peninsula. Smallwood fretted because of the exposure of his undermanned garrison at Wilmington and the threat to federal stores at Charlestown and in the counties below him. Governor Johnson wanted the Maryland assembly to proclaim martial law in Somerset and set up courts martial with power to execute spies and armed insurgents. Congress received further reports of insurrection in Sussex. Maryland ordered its militia in Queen Annes and Kent to pursue the insurgents, across the state line if necessary, until they were "entirely broke up."61

Especially alarming was the disturbance at the head of the Chester river, an area overlapping parts of Queen Annes county in Maryland and Kent in Delaware. The Tories, said to have British officers among them and to be expecting reinforcement from Philadelphia, were harassing the local population and seizing food, arms and ammunition from those who would not join them.62 It was into this area that Francis Asbury had ridden in his flight from Thomas White's home. Apparently he had taken refuge at John Fogwell's at the time that alarms over the latest Tory depredations were reaching their peak. Of critical import for the Methodists, and for the climate affecting White's case, was the association of Cheney Clow's name with the expected uprising at the center of the

60. The delegates expunged the following paragraph from the letter submitted by their committee: "Congress reposes the greatest Confidence in the assembly and executive of your State, composed at present of Gentlemen well attached to the Common Cause; but Congress deemed the Power of your State inadequate from the very great Inequality between the Whigs and Tories, and were apprehensive if your Executive attempted to seize the Leaders of your Malignants that your Weakness would be discovered and that you would become more odious to those whom you cannot govern." Journals of the Continental Congress 1774-1789, X, 351-52.


62. Ibid., XXI, 46. General Smallwood thought the reports exaggerated and doubted that British officers were among the insurgents, but he urged immediate suppression. Confessing lack of influence with the Delaware legislature, he appealed to General Washington to press Delaware to send militia against the rebels. Smallwood to Henry Laurens, Wilmington, April 17, 1778, The Papers of the Continental Congress 1774-1789, National Archives Microfilm Publications, Microcopy 247, Roll 179, Item 161, 1, 179-80.
Peninsula.

Cheney Clow, leader of what came to be known as "Clow's rebellion," was described by Freeborn Garrettson as "a backslidden Methodist... once thought to be a pious man, of considerable note in the society." According to Garrettson, Clow intended "to make his way through the country to the Chesapeake to join the British." 63 Clow's followers had erected a "fort" near his house in Kent county some two hundred yards east of the Maryland line. A party of Delaware militia ordered out by President Rodney routed Clow and his forces and burned the "fort." Clow himself escaped, but about fifty of his followers were taken into custody. Rodney estimated the number of Clow's party at 150. 64

Congress turned to Maryland to conduct operations against the insurgents. The governor and council of Maryland were "requested immediately to embody three hundred militia of the eastern shore...under active and spirited officers, and to order them to march...into the Delaware State." To a special committee of three of its own members Congress assigned the task of advising the officer commanding the Peninsula operation and of "enquiring into, detecting and defeating all disaffections, conspiracies and insurrections." Congress also renewed and extended extraordinary powers earlier invested in General Washington for dealing with communication with the enemy. 65 It is not clear when the disorders associated with Clow were brought to an end. A month later the Maryland council, still hearing complaints of marauding by Tories supposedly under Clow's command, ordered scouting parties into "the upper part of Kent and Queen Annes counties with power if necessary to Act in the State of Delaware." 66

63. Nathan Bangs, *The Life of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson* (New York, 1839), p. 64. Clow was born in England and brought by his parents to Queen Annes County. After the boundary settlement of 1768 his farm lay on the western edge of Delaware. It remains difficult to separate fact from myth in the accounts of Clow's activities. See Thompson, *Life and Correspondence of George Read*, p. 323-25. The material in Thompson is summarized from an account in *Delaware Register*, 1, 220-26.

64. Charles Pope to Caesar Rodney, Grog Town, April 14 and April 16, 1778; Caesar Rodney to Henry Laurens, Dover, April 24, 1778, Rodney, *Letters*, pp. 259, 260, 263. Clow was not arrested until 1782. Tried for the alleged murder of a member of the sheriff's posse that seized him, he was condemned to death by hanging. He remained in jail for five years before execution of the sentence. Of the attempt to implicate the Methodists in Clow's activities Garrettson wrote: "His excellency, Caesar Rodney,...was friendly to religion. Our enemies were assiduous in their endeavors to prejudice his mind against us, inculcating the idea that we were tories, and ought to be crushed as a body. He insisted on knowing how many of these insurrectionists there were of each denomination and when they found that there were only two Methodists among them, the governor's remarks made our enemies look small before the court. They were all pardoned except C. Clowe." Bangs, *Freeborn Garrettson*, p. 64.


66. *Archives of Maryland*, XXI, 107, 114.
New Turn of Affairs and Vision of a Garden

With the militia still searching along the border for remnants of insurrection, Francis Asbury, after three weeks at Fogwell's, made his way back to White's. His journal reflects the "strangely twisted and tortured" motions of his mind as he waited ten more days for the return of his host: "I know not how to fight, nor how to fly." On May 9, five weeks after his arrest, Thomas White returned to his family. On May 25, he "went back to have his case determined," and upon giving his parole was permitted to remain at his home. He continued to press for a hearing, however, and Congress referred his request to the special committee appointed earlier to deal with insurrection on the Peninsula. 67

If the desire of Delaware Whigs to consolidate a moderate position in their state had served Thomas White's interest after his arrest, the whole new turn in American affairs worked further to his advantage after his release. British failures, the treaty with France and the resolution of difficulties between Congress and General Washington were among factors in the improved position of the Americans. With the British evacuation of Philadelphia in June, 1778 the war moved even further from the Peninsula. Attacks from privateering vessels continued near the Bay, but Delaware Tories, save for scattered incidents, "subsided into watchful silence." 68 By midsummer President Rodney ordered the disbanding of the independent militia company in all three counties. 69 "I thank God Affairs now wear a different Complection," Rodney wrote to Thomas McKean, "and...Civil Government, I am Convinced, will soon be in such force as to cause those who have offended to Tremble...." McKean, too, felt encouraged, but advised Rodney: "Warn the people... not to be lulled by these pleasing prospects...." 70

Thomas White and Francis Asbury had survived the crisis presented by White's arrest, but neither of the men could rest at ease. Apparently White was the surer of his position. His hospitality toward the Methodists continued undiminished. Even before his parole "preachers and people" gathered at his home for their quarterly meeting. "We were quiet and undisturbed," Asbury noted. 71 In the next six months preachers from the Western Shore as well as the Peninsula found their way to White's for visits

---


68. Hancock, Delaware Loyalists, pp. 38-40.


70. Caesar Rodney to Thomas McKean, Newark, June 11, 1778, and McKean to Rodney, York Town, June 17, 1778, Rodney, Letters, pp. 271-74.

with Asbury. White’s persistent requests for a hearing on the charges against him indicate confidence in his ultimate vindication.

We know much more of Asbury’s state of mind than White’s. Entries in the journal are brief and sometimes cryptic; but they enable us to trace his course during the two years remaining before his return to Baltimore. His mood alternated between extremes. After he preached to two large congregations on a Sunday in June, old visions of triumph returned: “As the Gospel of Jesus Christ meets with indulgence in this free State, I entertain a hope that...Delaware will become as the garden of the Lord, filled with plants of his own planting.” Rumors of a peace treaty with Lord North’s commissioners inspired a vision of the “free course” of the Gospel “through the land.” Soon he was planning an itinerary of two weeks duration, “one step towards my former regularity in what appears to me as my duty, my element, and my delight.” By the end of July he began to think it his duty “to abide for a season in this state,” and expressed “great hopes” for a “revival of pure and vital piety.” Yet there were times, especially in a period of illness in the fall, when gloom swept back over him. “My usefulness appeared to be cut off; I saw myself pent up in a corner; my body in a manner worn out; my English brethren gone, so that I have no one to consult.” As late as December he wondered if he had “done wrong in retiring from the work.” He still expected to confront a choice between continuing to preach and defiling his conscience.

From firsthand accounts he knew of the continuing persecution of the Methodist itinerants. Joseph Hartley, freshly released from his confinement in Queen Annes county, visited at White’s. So did Freeborn Garrettson. Garrettson found Asbury “very unwell. I had sweet opportunity of preaching at his place of confinement. After some agreeable conversation with Mr. Asbury, I went on to Maryland.” Within a few days Garrettson was beaten by a former Queen Annes magistrate and threatened with imprisonment. When he came to Dover in September a mob surrounded him shouting, “He is one of Clowe’s men — hang him — hang him.” Rescued by “several gentlemen of the town,” he preached to the crowd...
from the door of the academy with a local squire standing beside him. 77

Garrettson's behavior under fire may well have bolstered Asbury's courage. Garrettson's charisma was of a kind not only to sway crowds but also to stand off his opponents. His preaching throughout the circuit gained him invitations to new places, increased the respect of those most inclined to persecute Methodists, and fortified his own confidence. 78

Shortly after the Dover mob threatened him Garrettson wrote to assure Asbury "that his way was open into any part of the state" and urged him to visit Dover. 79 Such encouragement from a native Marylander, himself under fire, must surely have nerved the Englishman at White's. In the fall Garrettson went into Sussex and Somerset counties "to form a circuit." When the Somerset sheriff came to arrest him in Salisbury, Garrettson warned the officer of divine intervention, and many of his enemies — so Garrettson reported — "trembled like a leaf." 80 Shortly thereafter Asbury himself set out for Somerset. Despite all his "foreboding apprehensions" no one offered him "the smallest insult." 81

Beyond Garrettson's example and support there were further encouragements for Asbury to pull free from the security of his retreat and resume the full activity of an itinerant. When Joseph Hartley became incapable of traveling in his portion of the Kent circuit, Asbury decided to assume that work himself. Hartley had been filling appointments in the vicinity of Dover. This new responsibility symbolized for Asbury the "more extensive service" that he desired. "I must commit myself to Divine Providence," he wrote, "and go forth to declare the glad tidings of salvation...; lest others should follow my example of partial silence without sufficient cause." 82 His "circuit in Kent," as he called his new self-appointed assignment, soon brought him to preach in Dover itself, where, he noted, "The most genteel people" treated him "with great kindness and courtesy." 83

Yet another and far more significant encouragement came to Asbury in the "agreeable news" that reached him on March 30, 1779. He offered no explanation beyond the comment: "Peradventure there is something in

77. Ibid., p. 74.
78. See, for instance, Bangs, pp. 72-73, for Garrettson's account of his preaching at William's and Lewis's in September, 1778, when he filled appointments for Asbury, who was ill at White's.
79. Bangs, Garrettson, p. 76.
80. Ibid., pp. 79-80.
82. Ibid., I, 285, 286, 291-92, 294, 296. Note Asbury's reference, Jan. 2, 1779, to his "late voluntary retirement." Other entries in the next three months, however, suggest that he had not yet gained sufficient confidence to cut himself off entirely from the shelter of White's home. Ibid., I, 296-298.
83. Ibid., I, 297.
the womb of Providence, for which the Lord hath been preparing me, by bringing me through the fire and water." 84 This cryptic entry apparently refers to his belated discovery that American officers had intercepted a letter he had written in 1777 expressing sentiments interpreted as favorable to the American cause. Thomas Ware, who wrote of the incident many years later, noted that the interception of Asbury's letter caused a change of "feeling respecting him, so that he was afterward treated with more favor than he had been before." Ware identified his source as "a man who was afterward governor of the state of Delaware." 85 Perhaps Richard Bassett was his authority.

"Very Respectable People"

Whatever the substance of the "agreeable news," there is no mistaking a new temper in Asbury's journal. Introspection and dejection gave place to the energy and initiative that characterized increasingly the last year of his retirement on the Peninsula. He began to cultivate relations with the Church of England clergy, particularly the Reverend Samuel Magaw, rector of Christ Church, Dover, who welcomed the Methodists and participated in their quarterly meetings. He assumed supervision over the seventeen preachers on "the northern stations," i.e., in Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, 86 and addressed letters to the preachers in Virginia and North Carolina in an effort to forestall, and then to heal, the schism over the ordinance question. He persisted in enforcing "old Methodism" discipline in the societies. He visited Joseph Hartley in Talbot county jail. He began plans for building chapels in Sussex and Kent.

Moreover, apparently clear now of suspicions of disloyalty, Asbury became a citizen of Delaware. 87 He moved more freely, though not in-

84. Ibid., I, 299.
85. According to Ware, the intercepted letter was addressed to Thomas Rankin, Wesley's general assistant in America, who, having passed through the British lines, was in Philadelphia awaiting passage to England. Rankin had written Asbury that the Americans should "submit to their rightful sovereign," the English King. "In reply, Mr. Asbury said, he was so strongly knit in affection to many of the Americans that he could not tear himself away from them: that he knew the Americans, and was well satisfied they would not rest until they had achieved their independence: and plainly intimated that he believed they would become a free and independent nation." Thomas Ware, Sketches of the Life and Travels of Rev. Thomas Ware...Written by Himself (New York, 1842), pp. 251-52.
86. "...we have not a sufficient number of proper preachers; some who are gifted cannot go into all the States, on account of the oaths; others are under bail, and cannot move far." Journal and Letters, I, 315-16.
87. "I became a citizen of Delaware, and was regularly returned. I was at this time under recommendation of the governor of Delaware as taxable." Journal and Letters, I, 346 and note, 399.
timely, among those he called "the great" and "persons of respectability." "I had access to the house of Governors Rodney, and Bassett, and Dr. Magaw. I went where I thought fit in every part of the state, frequently lodged in the houses of very reputable people of the world and we had a great work... I took no state oath first, or last, no man molested me." 

Paralleling Asbury's increased activity and his growing sense of acceptance was Thomas White's continuing effort to clear his name on the records of Congress. His petitions bore tacitly, at least, the support of Caesar Rodney. On August 3, 1779, "on motion of the delegates of Delaware," Congress discharged White from his parole. Thus, White again stood indebted to the moderate position of the Delaware Whigs. In this connection one may also note that Thomas White and Richard Bassett, whose names were connected in the Tory "enterprise against Dover" in 1776, were to rank among the most prominent first-generation Methodists in Delaware.

As Francis Asbury's stay on the Peninsula drew to its close, the emerging new status of the Methodists found dramatic illustration in Freeborn Garrettson's release from prison in Dorchester county. Garrettson was invited to preach in Dorchester by Squire Henry Airey, whose recent conversion to Methodism resulted from the influence of Mary Ennals, sister-in-law of Richard Bassett. Airey first met Garrettson at Thomas White's. With Asbury's approval Garrettson went to Maryland and after preaching two weeks was lodged in the jail at Cambridge. A deposition that Thomas White gave to Thomas Garrettson attesting his brother's "unblemished character," his reputation for piety, and his compliance with Delaware laws apparently proved unavailing. At length Henry Airey went on Garrettson's bond in the amount of 20,000 pounds as security for Garrettson's appearance before the executive council of Delaware and his subsequent return to Dorchester. Garrettson brought back a "com-

88. Ibid., I, 303, 293, 337.
89. Francis Asbury [to Zachariah Myles, Perry Hall, Maryland], Aug. 16, 1804, Journals and Letters, III, 298. This letter reflects a certain defensiveness later to be found in Asbury concerning his "retirement" on the Peninsula. See Journals and Letters, II, 640-42, for his comment on Jesse Lee's History.
90. "... Mr. White is still under Parole to General Smallwood, and therefore wishes, if they have any thing to alledge against him, to have a hearing, or to be discharged — as his request seems to be reasonable, you will be pleased to move Congress for that purpose — Mr. White's papers are in the hands of Honb. Nicholas VanDike Esqr. Caesar Rodney to John Dickinson, Dover, April 17, 1779, Rodney, Letters, p. 298.
92. "Probably [Methodism's] most prominent converts in Delaware were Richard Bassett, Allen McLane, Thomas White, and Philip Barratt, of whom the first two were leading Federalists, as were two sons of the others, Samuel White and Andrew Barratt." Munroe, Federalist Delaware, p. 240.
mandatory letter” from Caesar Rodney and “was instantly set at liberty.”

In mid-April, 1780, twenty-nine months, lacking a few days, after he came to the Peninsula, the Methodist itinerant bade farewell to his Tory host. The two men had shared mutual support in weathering the crisis of persecution. White’s hospitality had made his home a base for Methodist operations on the Peninsula. Asbury had emerged from its shelter to plant “the Garden of Methodism” in Delaware and to gain the confidence of the conservative leaders of the state. The refugee preacher had become an American.

Most important perhaps for the Methodist movement in the new nation soon to be established, one of John Wesley’s missionaries had gained the confidence of the preachers on “the northern stations” and marked out his claims for the leadership he would exert for the next thirty-six years. To be sure, he had yet to confront the young native preachers in Virginia and North Carolina, who in the spirit of the times, and in careless disregard of their heritage, would have gone their own way. But, whatever might be the resolution of that issue, Francis Asbury had established on the Peninsula a base for continuity. “If I cannot keep up old Methodism in any other place, I can in the peninsula: that must be my last retreat.” He stopped briefly in Dover. “... called at Mrs. Magaw’s; we parted in much affection. Called at Mr. Bassett’s...” Next day, “a little before sunset,” he came to the Susquehanna River “and passed over in the night.” In Baltimore, where the conference would meet, he entered in his journal: “I could not pray for our friends we left behind without weeping.”

---

93. *Archives of Maryland*, XLIII, 103, 430, 439, 444-45, 448, 454; Bangs, *Garrettson*, pp. 98-107. Garrettson’s apologetic interest marks most of his reporting of this period. He wrote that Asbury went to the governor of Maryland in his behalf, and added that the governor of Delaware was a friend to the Methodists. “He met me at the door, and welcomed me in, assuring me he would do any thing he could to help me.”

94. For indications of Methodist expansion on the Peninsula in these years see *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, 1773-1813* (New York, 1813); Munroe, *Federalist Delaware*, pp. 55-57.
