The bicentennial of American independence and North Carolina Methodism occurred coincidentally in 1976—a year which understandably occasioned a spate of historical interest, activity, and publication. This commemorative volume consists of an excellent introduction and nine separate but interrelated essays by capable lay and professional scholars. Some of the essayists adopt a narrative style while others are more analytical and introspective. Few collaborative efforts will prove as satisfactory and durable.

Organized chronologically, the essays treat the British background of Methodism, the trauma of establishing the faith in the New World, and the continuing accommodation of North Carolina Methodism to social and political realities. Additionally there are two essays relating to education and one to Black Methodists.

By all numerical and financial criteria North Carolina Methodism has enjoyed remarkable successes; however, as essayists Stuart C. Henry, Larry E. Tise, Donald G. Mathews, and Robert T. Osborn have concluded, these successes suggest the extent to which Methodism has been transformed from “a religion of the poor and the powerless to a religion of the well-to-do and powerful.” This thesis is predicated on the assumption that Methodism has expeditiously accommodated to prevailing social norms despite the “counsel of the cross.”

Race has clearly been the most persistent and troublesome social issue confronting southern Christians. North Carolina Methodists embraced slavery and subsequently segregation as readily as other denominations even though their heritage was rooted in concern for the downtrodden. Joseph Bethea’s essay, “Black Methodists in North Carolina,” calmly implies that white Methodists have been self-centered and have cared little for the human rights and needs of blacks. Ralph E. Luker’s essay on race relations, 1885-1920, substantiates Bethea’s conclusions as does Osborn’s discussion of Methodist theology in the late nineteenth century.

Traditionally historians speculate about the past without
much regard for contemporary sensibilities. Even though many readers may find these excellent essays disturbing, perhaps this volume will inspire North Carolina Methodists to place doctrinal belief before church organization so that a brotherhood of believers may be achieved within the next hundred years.

—Max R. Williams
Western Carolina University


This second volume of a twenty-volume set is now available. Scarecrow offers a pre-publication price of $15.00 per volume, which is effective through June 30, 1977. The publisher's address is P. O. Box 656, Metuchen, N. J. 08840.


Dr. Smeltzer is the author of *Methodism on the Headwaters of the Ohio* (1950); *The Story of Methodism in the Pittsburgh Region* (1958), and *Methodism in Western Pennsylvania, 1784-1968* (1969). Anyone familiar with those works will find little that is new in the first 326 pages of this volume. But chapters X-XIII trace United Brethren and Evangelical history in Western Pennsylvania from 1838-1968. Chapter XIV deals with aspects of the United Methodist story in the region since the merger of 1968.

Thus Dr. Smeltzer has produced a kind of summation of his more than forty years of research into the history of his conference. It appears to be an accurate recounting of the origins and institutional development of that organization. It is documented primarily from annual conference minutes and secondary sources. Its greatest assets are the way in which he has organized the story of four denominations with parallel histories and the maps, charts, and diagrams which clarify origins, development, and contemporary conditions. In a state
where the EUB Church was strong Dr. Smeltzer's work will help to give the members of the new denomination a sense of common tradition. His book should be in the reading program of both the clergy and the lay leadership of the Western Pennsylvania Conference.

In reading this, as most other conference histories, one wishes for greater emphasis on lay founders (female and male) and on the role of local preachers; persons such as John Wrenshall, store owner, preacher, founder of Methodism in Pittsburgh (pp. 93-98). Also greater use of archives—secular and ecclesiastical—would reveal the social and cultural context of church history, thereby giving clues to the role of the church in the larger life of the region. Above all this kind of study needs to put aside the St. Peter Principle of Ecclesiastical History: that the Church and her leaders are always motivated by high principle and always have a benevolent influence on people and events.

—C. W. Brockwell, Jr.
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(Source of purchase is Methodist Headquarters, 715 Center Street, Little Rock, Arkansas 72201.)

Walter Vernon has done an exceptional job covering a very broad range of concern. His story spans 160 years and virtually every aspect of the Methodist Church in Arkansas. In broad strokes, he writes of the planting of Methodism by preachers who followed the migration of the people, started churches from scratch when there were no pastors, no congregations, no buildings, no organized structure. For instance, the census for the Arkansas area in 1810 showed 1,062 inhabitants. Against this pioneer setting, Walter Vernon begins his interesting account of how the itinerant system took hold and how later it served the purposes for growth and expansion of the Methodist Church as it reached formidable proportions.

This history of a new church in a new state is not entirely without its shaded periods. The author, to my mind, is most interesting when he recounts, step by step, how Methodists in
Arkansas responded to the issue of slavery, both before and following the Civil War. One reads about the division in the whole of American Methodism over slavery. 1844 stands as a pivotal year in Methodism, just as 1860 was a pivotal year in the life of the United States. The story is continued beyond the Civil War through the civil rights struggle in recent years and reveals a slow and painful progress in the pursuit of justice and equality — for all.

The courageous stand of the leadership of Arkansas Methodism during the 1957 confrontation at Little Rock Central High School is delineated. Vernon's narrative goes right up to the dissolution of the Central Jurisdiction Southwestern Conference in 1974.

The workings of the appointment system in Arkansas, the establishment of colleges and publications, the evangelistic expression of Arkansas Methodism, the effective organization of women for mission, the sending forth of missionaries, pastors, and the making of a larger place for laity — all these are included.

Methodism in Arkansas is rescued from the boredom of a standard "conference history" by the inclusion of a wealth of great anecdotes that have been passed down from generation to generation coming out of the experiences of some of Arkansas Methodism's most colorful leaders. Walter Vernon writes interestingly and documents his work thoroughly.

A history sometimes wed uncomfortably to the culture, one reads of the limited response of Methodists when 60,000 Indians were moved across the state following a veritable "trail of tears". There were individual instances of great heroism and compassionate response to the plight of these original Americans, but the Methodist itinerant system did not fit a ministry to the movement of the Indian peoples.

The split of the church over slavery and the consequences of the Civil War left those who had followed the Confederacy humiliated. The conference at one point wanted to insert in the Discipline of the general church a rule forbidding preachers to discuss partisan political issues in the pulpit.

The Arkansas culture in those early years at times intimidated its prophetic voice and influenced the church to steer clear of controversy. This was true in other places as well as when the church was aligned too closely with the status quo.

My great grandfather was a circuit rider in Arkansas 130
years ago. I started my own ministry just at the beginning of the civil rights epoch which was born in 1954 — the last in a long succession of struggles in which the church had to deal with new realities so well outlined by Walter Vernon.

— Joe Hale
World Methodist Council