THEY CHAMPIONED THE CHEROKEES

WALTER N. VERNON

Tennessee and Mississippi Methodists in the 1820s and 1830s achieved possibly the most widespread success of any Protestant effort in American to win Native American converts to the Christian faith. John Stewart’s earlier preaching to the Wyandots in Ohio was the first successful Methodist mission to Indians, but it was limited in scope.¹ Alexander Talley had remarkable success among the Choctaws in Mississippi between 1827 and 1830, enlisting as many as 4,000 members with a small corps of assistants.² Tennessee Conference missionaries did not have as much success numerically, but felt rewarded by converts who were unusually dedicated and soon provided much leadership themselves in the task of evangelism.

Officially, evangelism among Indians in the South was initiated by the Rev. William Capers of the South Carolina Conference when he was appointed “Missionary to the [Creek] Indians” in Alabama, at the conference session in January, 1821.³ This account will deal with mission work among the Cherokee Indians by members of the Tennessee Conference. It will include a condensed version of the growth of this work, and a somewhat fuller account of the arrest of two Tennessee Conference missionaries by the State of Georgia for their preaching to the Cherokees in Georgia.

The Beginning

Methodist missions to the Cherokees began in the spring of 1822⁴ when Richard Riley, a native Cherokee, invited Richard Neely, assistant preacher on the Paint Rock Circuit, to preach at his house in an area called Creek Path. This was twelve miles south of Fort Deposit, about where Guntersville is today. Several services were held, and in the summer of 1822 a Methodist society of thirty-three members was organized, of which Riley was appointed leader. The Rev. William McMahon, presiding

²Ibid., pp. 135-143.
³General Minutes, Methodist Episcopal Church, p. 369.
They Championed the Cherokees

elder of the Huntsville, Alabama, District (then in the Tennessee Conference), held a quarterly meeting in the fall, at which the preaching services resulted in the conversion of several other Cherokees who joined the church.

When the Rev. Andrew J. Crawford was appointed pastor-missionary in the fall of 1822, he soon established a school for children. Crawford was said to be a relative of Andrew Jackson, and had fought in the Battle of New Orleans. After he joined the Tennessee Conference he also served as a surveyor for the United States government; this enabled him to serve the churches on a small salary. Crawford's school's original enrollment of twelve soon grew to twenty-five. The Cherokees also built a comfortable house to preach in, and held services even when the circuit-preacher was not present. In July, 1823, a camp-meeting was held, some persons coming from as far as sixty miles away. Thirty-one converts were reported and twenty-five adults and twenty children were baptized. Two other societies grew out of the camp-meeting, and two Cherokees became exhorters: Edward Gunter and John Brown. By 1824 there were 108 members of Methodist societies in the Alabama area, and 188 in all the Cherokee societies.

The Members Increase

By 1824 the Holston Conference was organized and assumed responsibility for Cherokee Methodists in its area. The Rev. D. B. Cumming was a leader in devoted service to the Cherokees in Holston territory, and later served for many years in the Indian Mission Conference in Oklahoma. Another helpful missionary was Madison C. Hawk, half-Cherokee, who joined the Holston Conference and served among the Cherokees. By 1827 Bishop Soule reported 670 Cherokee Methodists altogether; at least several hundred of these were in the Holston area. In 1836 the conference had 752 Indian Methodists. By 1830 the Missionary Herald, magazine of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (a joint effort between Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, and German Reformed churches) reported over 800 Methodists among the Cherokees, compared to 180 Presbyterians, 54 United Brethren, and 50 Baptists.

John B. McFerrin was appointed as one of the missionaries to the Cherokees in 1827 and served two years, making numerous converts and life-long friends. He made his "home" at Gunter's house in Alabama,

---

5 Letter by Timothy S. M. Hawk, August 8, 1909. Special Collections, Library, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, MS-263.
7 May, 1830.
traveled over much of the Cherokee Nation, taking Joseph Blackbird along as his interpreter on preaching tours. One of his preaching places was near Ross’s Post Office in Georgia, close to present-day Chattanooga. Methodist preaching had already begun there, at the initiative of Joseph Coody, who had invited Methodist ministers to preach at his home as early as 1822.

Soon after this early preaching at Coody’s, a Methodist society was organized, and Coody became an exhorter and leader in the church. His wife, Jane Ross, was a sister of John Ross, later chief of the Nation for many years. She was probably partly responsible for her brother’s conversion and for joining the Methodist Church. Ross was “moved” (converted?) under the preaching of Bishop William McKendree in the fall of 1828. He joined the Methodist Church fairly soon after, under the ministry of McFerrin. In 1830 a traveler in Cherokee country was present at a Methodist preaching service in Ross’s home, attended by about fifty persons, and one account states that Ross provided a building for regular Methodist services.

Loyal Members — and Preachers

The loyalty of the early Cherokees to their church is well illustrated when the “mission church house” at Creek Path burned a few years after it was established. Richard Neely reported that by the next week “the brethren and neighbors joined in and built [another] very decent good house, twenty by twenty-six feet. And let it be remarked, that this house will cost the missionary society nothing.”

Neely also commented in the same report that “about four hundred of these perishing sheep of the wilderness have been gathered in to the fold of Christ, who now mingle with their white brethren, in hope of a common seat in heaven.” A few years later the report to the Missionary Society declared that Cherokee Methodists “love and appreciate the discipline of the Church.”

Native Preachers

Some, at least, of the Methodist success in winning converts was due to their use of Cherokee preachers, or exhorters, and interpreters. Frequently the white preachers reported lack of success because they could

---


*Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald* (New York). September 17, 1830.

*Annual Report, the Missionary Society, Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1827, p. 27.

find no adequate interpreters. Rev. William McMahon explained the adding of 275 Cherokee members to the church in 1827-28 thus: “Have several converted natives who are licensed exhorters and preachers, who zealously declare the truth as it is in Christ to their red brethren, in their own native tongue.” McMahon himself evidently “zealously declared to truth in Christ,” for two months later he reported having held twenty-six camp meetings in the previous year, resulting in over 800 professions, including the mission to the Cherokees.

Among these pioneer Cherokee preachers were some very effective ones. Turtle Fields, a little more than half Cherokee, was in 1826 the first Indian to become a Tennessee Conference member. McMahon called him “my dear and pious brother Fields,” and commented that a letter from him “gladdens and comforts my poor heart. God is with him of a truth...” Before he joined the Conference Fields addressed the conference Missionary Society (1825), with James Brown as his interpreter. His manner was described as “easy, graceful, and appropriate... nothing strained or unnatural... a strength of intellect and measure of religious knowledge....” Later Fields was joined by Richard Neely, Samuel Gunter, John Brown, Edward Graves, and Joseph Blackbird in singing an Indian song “that gave a mellowing touch to the meeting.” Greenwood LeFlore, Choctaw chief and a convert of Alexander Talley in Mississippi, attended the Tennessee Conference session in 1829, and inspired his hearers.

The Rev. John Fletcher Boot was ordained a local preacher and became the first Cherokee to administer the Lord’s Supper to his people. Other Cherokee preachers were Tussawalita, Young Wolf, Weelooker, Arch Campbell, and Edward Graves. Among the other interpreters were Edward Gunter and Jack Spears.

The Methodist Approach

Methodist preaching—and singing and praying—appealed to the Cherokees. Critics have charged that the fervor and emotionalism of Methodist camp-meetings swept the Cherokees off their feet. If true at all, this would be only partly true, for we know that most of these Methodist missionaries were not fanatics but sober, stable men. Also, they placed their converts in class meetings, where their Christian growth was carefully nurtured, and the Methodist Discipline and Hymn Book guided the steps of both teacher and pupil. Some religious groups sought first to “civilize” the Indians and later to convert them to Christianity; the Methodists used the opposite approach, feeling that after conversion the

15Holston Conference Messenger, August 11, 1827.
16Ibid., January 13, 1826.
Indians were more open to education and other aspects of the white culture.

The Methodists, however, did not neglect schools, especially for children, of course. The Rev. Francis A. Owen reported in 1830 that there were schools at Chat-too-ga (thirty pupils), Mt. Wesley (twenty pupils), Asbury (fifteen pupils), Coo-sa-wa-tee (twenty-seven pupils), Agency School (twenty children), and Lookout Mountain (fifteen children).17

In any event, the Methodist brand of religion spread rapidly among the Cherokees, as noted above. By 1831 membership in the Cherokee Mission was over 1,000. But there were other advances in addition to numbers. Secretary of War John H. Eaton received a letter in 1829 from Governor William Carroll of Tennessee that stated: “The advancement which the Cherokees have made in religion, morality, general information and agriculture, is astonishing beyond anything that I had conceived of. They have regular preachers of their own and in many places family worship and prayer meetings are strictly attended to. . . .”18

The Methodists had a big hand in this Cherokee advancement in religion and morality, as we have seen. An evidence of Methodist involvement is found in the frequent references to them in the Missionary Heald, such as these: “I find many of the people here [Creek Path] who have united with the Methodist society” (March 1824). “At another meeting in the afternoon [at Brainard School] addresses were made by a man called the Whirlwind, a member of the Methodist church, and by Mr. Huss, in their native tongue. . . . Singing and prayers were in the Cherokee language. We regarded it, all together, as an animating scene” (November, 1826). And McFerrin reported that his two years of preaching to the Cherokees made his sermons “more plain, pointed, and perspicuous.”19

Cherokee Methodists in 1831 organized their own Branch Ministry Society of the Cherokee Nation, with a Cherokee president, W. S. Adair. And likely they were at least partly responsible for several features in the Cherokee Constitution favorable to religion. One of these was that “no person who denies the being of God . . . shall hold any office in the Civil Department of this nation;” and another provided that “The free exercise of religious worship and serving God without distinction, shall forever be allowed within this nation.”20

Friends and Foes of Christianity

Of course, acceptance of Christianity among the Cherokees was not unanimous. In fact, there was some open opposition. In 1828 a full-

17Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald (New York), April 2, 1830.
18Bureau of Indian Affairs Files, National Archives. Microfilm Roll 113, Microcopy 234.
19Fitzgerald, McFerrin, p. 70.
20Arkansas Gazette, March 26, 1828.
They Championed the Cherokees

blooded Cherokee, Whitepath, headed a movement opposed to the Cherokee government and against the Christian religion.\(^{21}\) The movement, however, soon subsided, and the Rev. Nicholas D. Scales, Methodist missionary, could write in 1828:

"There are three large circuits, embracing about sixty preaching places, upon two of which the gospel is regularly preached in English, and on the other in Cherokee. . . . There are seven hundred members of Society. Some of whom are leading men of the nation, and many families of first respectability. These united exert a happy influence over their relatives, neighbors and the nation generally."

Scales concluded his letter by saying: "... It is time that the enemies of Missionaries, should hush their objections and throw down their oppositions. . . ."\(^{22}\)

Samuel A. Worcester, beloved and genuine friend of the Cherokee, and a missionary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, gave his judgment in 1830 that "the greater part of the [Cherokee] people acknowledge the Christian religion to be the true religion, and many others do not feel its power. Through the blessing of our God, however, religion is steadily gaining ground."\(^{23}\) Methodists played a significant role in this progress. Methodist and other missionaries were considered the friends of the Indians; the hardest criticism that would be made today is that they were paternalistic in dealing with the "children of the forest," as they sometimes called them.

Cherokees Develop a Stable, Settled Society

The Cherokees had settled down as tillers of the soil, though continuing to hunt also. In 1831 twelve of the missionaries joined in a statement declaring that "the Cherokees are rapidly advancing in civilization."\(^{24}\) The statement pointed out as verification the kind of clothes worn, the houses built and furnished; that nearly half of those between childhood and middle age could read their language in Guess (Sequoyah's) alphabet, and some could read English; that superstitious beliefs were declining, and added:

"Thirty years ago a plough was scarcely seen in the nation. Twenty years ago there were nearly 500. Still the ground was cultivated chiefly by the hoe only. Six years ago the number of ploughs, as enumerated, was 2,923. . . . We scarcely know a field which is now cultivated without ploughing. . . . Suffering for want of food is as rare, we believe, as in any part of the civilized world."

---


\(^{23}\) *New Echota Letters*, p. 80.

\(^{24}\) *New Echota Letters*, p. 86.
These prosperous farms of the Cherokees became the envy of nearby white settlers, who were pushing westward from Virginia and the Carolinas. This pressure from a growing population around the Cherokees increased the resolution by government officials and many citizens in the late 1820s to persuade—or force—the Indians in the Southeast (and elsewhere) to move west. This naturally affected the work of the Christian missionaries of all denominations. Small groups of Indians began migrating to the West; in late 1829 and 1830 five hundred Cherokees reached Indian Territory.

Missionaries Champion the Cherokees

Consequently on September 30, 1830, the seven Methodist missionaries among the Cherokees gathered at Coosawatee and drafted a series of resolutions, starting with a recognition of “the present oppressed condition of our brethren, the Cherokees” and soliciting from the Tennessee Conference “a public and official expression of sentiment on the subject of their grievances.” They continued by affirming their belief that the Cherokees were “firmly resolved not to remove from their present homes, unless forced to do so, either by power or oppression,” and that such a removal “would, in all probability, be ruinous to the best interests of the nation.” Chairman of the group was Francis A. Owen, and secretary was Dickson C. McLeod. The report of the action of the missionaries appeared in the Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald for October 29, 1830, only five days before the Tennessee Conference met at Franklin, Tennessee.

Conference Refuses to Challenge State

The request of the missionaries that the Conference declare itself on the efforts of government officials to move the Indians to the West confronted the members with little delay. McFerrin was present at the conference and (as we have noted) had been a missionary to the Cherokees. He wrote that “The matter elicited an animated debate,” but in the end there was little to comfort the Cherokees, for the conference held firmly to the Disciplinary statement: “As far as it represents civil affairs, we believe it the duty of Christians . . . to be subject to the supreme authority of the country where they may reside.” The resolutions included these statements:

“1. Resolved, That whatever may be our private views and sentiments . . . relative to the sufferings and privations of the aboriginal nations of our country . . . or of the policy adopted and pursued by the State authorities or General Government, yet, as a body of Christian ministers, we do not feel at liberty, nor are we disposed, to depart from the principles uniformly maintained by the members and ministers of our Church in carefully refraining from all such interference with political affairs.

“2. Resolved, That however we may appreciate the purity of motive and intention by which our missionary brethren were actuated, yet we regret that they should have
committed themselves and us so far as to render it impossible for us to omit with propriety to notice their proceedings in this public manner.

"3. Resolved, That while we have confidence in the wisdom and integrity of our rulers, we sincerely sympathize with our Cherokee brethren in their present afflictions, and assure them of our unavailing zeal for the conversion and salvation of their souls."

Dr. McFerrin then adds: "Such has been the tone and sentiment of Southern Methodists from the beginnings. Non-interference, as a Church in State or governmental affairs has been their motto."

Dr. Wade Crawford Barclay, eminent historian of Methodist missions, quotes these sentiments of the Conference, and then criticizes them as weak and apologetic:

"Not a word of criticism of the flagrant violation of civil liberties by the military authorities! Not a word of recognition of the courageous protest of the missionaries against the inexcusable cruelty of treatment of their fellow workers!"

**Pressure Mounts to Move Cherokees**

But events did not stand still. The discovery of gold in the hills of northern Georgia about this time increased the desire of whites to get hold of the Cherokee lands and to force the Indians to move west. E. Merton Coulter describes the encounter thus:

"... A stampede set in which filled the [gold] diggings with a wild and lawless population. To control them, Federal troops were marched in, and were marched out again when Georgia indicated to her friend, President Jackson, that she did not want them, and that she would manage the region. In 1830 she required all white people in the Cherokee country to secure before March 1 of the following year, a permit to reside there. Though designed primarily to bring to order the lawless gold-diggers, this law also touched the missionaries, [some of whom] had been working among the Cherokees from the beginning of the century. Even if their own sympathies had not inclined them to the Cherokee position, they would have found it politic in their work with the Indians to agree with them. As a result, the missionaries had become a pernicious influence in the ... imbroglio. ... They had steeled the hearts of the Indians against removal and had brought down upon themselves the hatred of Georgia.

Headstrong and unwise, some of them showed their contempt for Georgia by refusing to call for permits and invited arrest. ..."

Grant Foreman, perhaps the foremost historian of Indian removal, agrees to some extent with Coulter's judgment: "The sympathies of the missionaries burned with a sense of the injustice put upon the Cherokee and they probably went outside their legitimate field as teachers and spiritual guides, to give encouragement and advice to sustain them in the unequal fight they were waging."

---

26Methodist Missions, II, 131.
Missionaries Take Their Stand...

Whether unwise and contemptuous or "outside their legitimate field," most of the missionaries felt that Georgia was illegally and unjustly claiming jurisdiction over the Cherokee Nation, which had a treaty for their land from the United States and thus was not subject to the laws of Georgia. The missionaries believed they would lose their reputation for integrity and justice if they agreed to Georgia's requirements, and that they would have little influence with the Indians if they applied for permits to stay in Cherokee territory—thus acknowledging Georgia's right to rule the Cherokees.

The earlier resolution adopted by the seven Methodist missionaries in September, 1830 (criticized by the Tennessee Conference, as we have noted) found more favorable response from twelve missionaries of other denominations in the Nation, among them some of the most respected and influential whites in the area. Their long statement, printed in the Cherokee Phoenix of January 1, 1831, charged that "the establishment of the jurisdiction of Georgia and other States over the Cherokee people, against their will, would be an immense and irreparable injury." This straightforward challenge to Georgia's efforts, and the subsequent refusal of some missionaries to apply for permits to remain among the Cherokees (which would acknowledge Georgia's claim to sovereignty) brought on one of the most dramatic and traumatic episodes in the annals of Methodist missions.

... and are Arrested

A few days after the new law went into effect on March 1, Worcester, Isaac Proctor, and John Tompson, American Board missionaries, not having signed for the permits, were arrested by a detachment of the Georgia Guard and taken into Georgia. However, they were released by the judge because they administered the Indian Civilization Fund and thus were agents of the United States, and not subject to state laws.

But in the week of July 7, 1831, another group of the Georgia Guard under Colonel C. H. Nelson (later joined by Col. J. W. A. Sanford) arrested Worcester, Isaac Proctor, and Dr. Elizur Butler of the American Board; and James J. Trott and Dickson C. McLeod, Methodist missionaries—all of whom were conscientious objectors to signing the oath demanded by Georgia officials. These men were forced to walk many miles (one account says 70, another over 100) by their captors, chained together at night, and chained to the guards' wagon in daytime. Dr. Butler was chained one night to a horse which fell in the dark and injured him. A third Methodist missionary, Martin Wells, followed the caravan in order to make McLeod's horse available for him to ride later, and was heavily struck with a club, though not arrested. All this time the journey was punctuated with the curses of the guards, called by McLeod "infuriated oaths...
They Championed the Cherokees

and horrid imprecations.” After several days of hard travel they were placed in “a miserable and filthy prison” at Camp Gilmer.29

McLeod was soon released when he proved he lived in Tennessee, and was not subject to Georgia laws, whereupon Colonel Nelson declared that if he had known he could not convict him he would have made the soldiers strip him, tie him to a tree, and give him fifty lashes. The imprisoned preachers asked permission to hold worship services on their first Sunday in jail, to which Colonel Nelson wrote back that the request was “an impertinent one.”30 Worcester was a U.S. postmaster in the Cherokee Nation and thus not subject to arrest by state officials, but Georgia Governor George R. Gilmer was able to persuade officials in Washington to dismiss Worcester as postmaster, and thus make their arrest of him legal. Finally, after various delays, the men were released on giving security for their appearance at the next term of the Superior Court.

Governor Defends Himself ...

Governor Gilmer, feeling the need to defend his actions, wrote an account, reprinted in the Christian Advocate and Journal of Zion’s Herald for September 30, 1831, in which he claimed that “Mr. McLeod’s statements . . . are wholly devoid of truth.” He denied that Georgia had no jurisdiction over the Cherokees, but he admitted that chaining the missionaries was regrettable, and claimed it was because the guards were “excited by the improper conduct of these men. . . . They [missionaries] were in the constant habit of speaking in the most opprobrious terms of our government, laws, and public authorities.” He admitted that he could “not excuse the severity with which he [McLeod] was treated.” But he declared that he had no authority to punish the guards, nor had Sanford, the Commander of the Georgia Guard, however improperly the guards acted. Gilmer, according to both Worcester and McLeod, instructed the guard, “If they [missionaries] are released by the courts, or give bail and return, arrest them again . . . “31

Missionaries go to Penitentiary ...

On September 16, 1831, eleven white men, including Worcester and Trott, were tried in Lawrenceville, Georgia and convicted at once: the jury used only ten minutes to confer. All were sentenced to four years in the penitentiary. Governor Gilmer persuaded all but the two American Board missionaries to agree they would not further violate the law and they were pardoned. The Methodist missionary, Trott, hesitated on his decision but finally decided to accept the Governor’s pardon and leave Georgia. He

28Christian Advocate and Journal. . . , August 12, 1831, p. 198.
29New Echota Letters, p. 100.
30New Echota Letters, p. 109; Christian Advocate and Journal. . . , November 25, 1831, p. 49.
also later left the Methodist ministry, but it is not clear what his reasons were.

Thus when the Tennessee Conference met at Paris (first session of an annual conference held west of the Tennessee River) on November 10, 1831, the members faced a very different situation regarding their missionaries to the Cherokees. Passing resolutions by the missionaries in 1830 was one thing, but being sentenced to the penitentiary was quite another. Consequently, a "Blue Ribbon" committee was appointed to propose some action by the conference. The members were Robert Paine, later a bishop; William McMahon, an earlier superintendent of the Cherokee Mission; Fountain E. Pitts, who went as the first Methodist missionary to South America in 1835; George W. D. Harris, a brother of Tennessee Governor I. G. Harris, and ancestor of a current member of Tennessee Conference; Francis A. Owen, later a Publishing Agent; John M. Holland, and Lorenzo D. Overall, both respected preachers. Everyone of these men was elected a delegate to the General Conference of 1832, and Dickson C. McLeod was elected a reserve delegate.32

The report was sent to the Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion's Herald and printed on January 6, 1832, with a note appended by Dr. Thomas L. Douglas certifying that it was adopted by the Tennessee Conference.

Conference Changes Its Stance

The tone and stance of the report was decidedly different from that of a year earlier. After a detailed review of the facts in the case, the committee gave approval to the actions of their fellow ministers in these words:

"... If they have taken an active part in counteracting the wishes of Georgia, or the general government, the committee cannot ascertain the fact. We wish it distinctly understood, That we should most decidedly disapprove of such conduct; and that we neither expect, nor desire any peculiar privileges; or to be exempted from the operation of the laws that Georgia, or any other state, may think necessary to enact. If the missionaries act improperly, let them suffer; but let them not suffer because they are missionaries; and least of all, let not insult and abuse be added to their afflictions.

"As a Church, we yield to none, in our affection to our beloved country, and in our willingness to render obedience to the powers that be. Under every government where we have been found, loyalty has been a marked characteristic of our Church....

"In conclusion, your committee much regret the occurrence of the difficulties referred to; but are bound to say, that so far as they have been enabled to push their inquiries, they have found nothing in the conduct of the missionaries, taking all the circumstances into consideration, that requires reprehension."33

33Christian Advocate and Journal... , January 6, 1832, p. 73.
They Championed the Cherokees

Supreme Court Clears Missionaries

But there is a sequel: Worcester and Butler carried their case (through their attorneys) to the Supreme Court of the United States. Accordingly, that court acted and on March 3, 1832, rules that Georgia had no jurisdiction over the Cherokee Nation. But President Andrew Jackson, who was determined to remove all the Indians to the West, ignored the verdict. He is quoted as saying, “John Marshall [Chief Justice of the Supreme Court] has made his decision; now let him enforce it.” But the Supreme Court’s verdict was clear-cut:

“It is the opinion of this court, that the act of the legislature of the state of Georgia upon which the indictment in this case is founded, is contrary to the constitution, treaties, and laws of the United States... And... it is further ordered... that the said Samuel A. Worcester be, and he hereby is, henceforth dismissed therefrom [that is, the judgment of the Georgia court].”

Having won his basic contention, Worcester decided to drop any further suit, and to ask for gubernatorial clemency, thus enabling the governor to save face, and Worcester to go free.

In essence, this verdict also cleared the Methodist missionaries who had been accused and/or arrested by Georgia officials. Not all Methodists approved the actions of the missionaries but many did. During Worcester’s imprisonment, many persons offered to aid him, among these being Chief (and Methodist) John Ross, who proposed to render “any service within the range of my power.” A Methodist clergyman, “Mr. St. Clear,” frequently visited the prisoners, and urged Worcester to take a less tenacious position. Before he was cleared Worcester was concerned that the general public might be led to believe some of the charges made against him—such as that he and other missionaries had found their stations too lucrative to give them up willingly (made by Governor Gilmer). When it appeared that such charges were not generally believed, Worcester commented, “It is a great happiness to be esteemed a deluded good man, rather than an ill-designing hypocrite.”

Declining Membership... Removal West

After the experience with the Georgia officials, Cherokee Methodist memberships began to decline, partly from unsettled conditions, and partly from the fact that small parties of Indians moved west from time to time. Between 1826 and 1840 almost all the Cherokees (except the remnant who hid out in the Smoky Mountains) had moved. There were about

34 Foreman, Indian Removal, p. 235.
35 Christian Advocate and Journal... , March 23, 1832, p. 119.
36 Missionary Herald, February, 1832, p. 46.
37 Ibid., January, 1832, p. 20.
17,000 Cherokees at the beginning of removal. By May, 1838, it was estimated, 2,000 were gone, and the remaining 15,000 were moved in the next twelve months by 7,000 militia and volunteers. About 4,000 died on the Trail of Tears.\(^8\)

This is not the place to try to present the details of the tragic story of the removal of these Native Americans. Grant Foreman put the essence of the tragedy succinctly:

"At last Indian removal was an accomplished fact. The white people had come into possession of the ancestral domain of the aboriginals. Exulting town boomers, land speculators and farmers overran the land and appropriated the sites that so recently had been cherished spots—the homes, villages, fields, and burying grounds of the Indians, even while the sad expatriates were toiling over cruel and forbidding highways. With bitter sorrow in their hearts, weakened by hardship and privation, decimated by disease, oppressed by penury, despondent and disheartened, they traveled on.\(^9\)

Cherokee — and Indian — Methodism Lives On

Methodist members, laity and ministerial, were prominent among those Cherokees who endured the shameful, bitter treatment of a stronger society. Yet they rallied their forces in the west and the Cherokee Methodists, won to Christ and nurtured in their faith by Tennessee missionaries, helped to create the Indian Mission (now Missionary) Conference in Oklahoma in 1844. It was organized in Riley’s Chapel, in Cherokee Country, near Tahlequah—named for Richard Riley who instigated that first Methodist preaching among the Cherokees in 1821 at Creek Path, Alabama. There were almost 3,000 Indian Methodists of all tribes in Oklahoma in 1844. A number of Cherokee and white preachers from Tennessee continued to serve their fellow-Methodists in the new home. Their successors are still doing so, with devotion and energy.

And they are continuing to spread the basic message their ancestors learned back in Tennessee, typified by this description of his conversion by the Rev. John Fletcher Boot, a conversion that occurred in 1844 on Gunter Circuit, Tennessee Conference:

I had a bad heart;
I know I was a great sinner;
But God loved me.
I prayed to him;
In my sorrow and despair
He forgave me,
And gave me a new heart.
I am happy in His love.\(^40\)

\(^8\)Foreman, *Indian Removal*, pp. 286, 312.