CHURCH UNION DIALOGUE IN THE COME-OUTER TRADITION:
WESLEYAN METHODISTS AND METHODIST PROTESTANTS
1858 - 1867

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In the wake of both the 1939 and 1968 reunions Methodists, and later United Methodists, felt a high degree of satisfaction about the regathering of the greater part of the American Methodist family. What lay behind the uniting conferences at Kansas City and Dallas were long periods of discussion and debate which eventuated in a triumph of historical consciousness over sectarian distinctives.¹ In the official statements of present United Methodism, we read much about those two events because each had a positive conclusion;² what about the numerous dialogues toward union which have not succeeded, but which have helped to identify other members in the Methodist family?

This paper is an attempt to recover part of the Methodist heritage in the “come-outer” tradition, one branch of which is still a distinct group, while the other is part of United Methodism.³ Wesleyan Methodists and Methodist Protestants learned much about themselves and their historic distinctiveness (which each might have taken for granted otherwise) during the eight years of union negotiations. Each member of the dialogue was forced to analyze the heritage, evolution, strengths, and weaknesses of the respective groups and either make that position adaptable to the


³The Methodist Protestant Church united in 1939 with the northern and southern branches of the Methodist Episcopal Church to form “The Methodist Church.” The Wesleyan Methodist Church united in 1968 with the Pilgrim Holiness Churches and the Reformed Baptist Churches of Canada to form the Wesleyan Church. A proposed merger in 1972 would have united the Wesleyans with the Free Methodist Church, but Wesleyan annual conferences rejected the proposal.
The generally positive and searching discussions which occurred between the Wesleyans and the Protestants between 1858 and 1867 pointed to the possibility that the two great reforming branches of Methodism might form a united, non-episcopal Methodist body. The dialogue was launched in conference sessions, official union committees, institutions, the religious press and, of course, between local churches. After two quadrennia of consideration, the talks broke off and ended in friendly failure. More than the resultant failure, the dialogue is instructive about the larger development and meaning of nineteenth century Methodism.

The First Phase: Beginning of Cooperation

A multiplicity of Methodist sects is obviously not necessary nor desirable in this country. Their differences are about such secondary questions, their agreement is so thorough on all fundamental matters, that the common sense of the public mind spontaneously refuses to recognize any necessity for division or discord among them.... A great waste of energy could be saved by their consolidation.

Most Methodists in 1858 would not have agreed with the perceptive Abel Stevens, author of the above quoted challenge, to unite the many branches of Methodism against a background of sectional rift and extreme moral suasion. Indeed, the two larger reforming bodies had expressed little or no interest in merger up through the early 1850s; as a Wesleyan writer put it, “it is difficult to ascertain exactly where a common line is to be found, into which we can all fall and march and move on together to common victories.” Yet, the tide turned and by mid-1858, Methodist Protestants and Wesleyan Methodists had found a common line and were discussing possibilities of cooperation.

The Protestants and the Wesleyans were both reformer sects. The former groups had “come out” of the Methodist Episcopal Church, they claimed only after expulsion. Following more than thirty years of struggle for lay representation and “mutual rights,” Methodist Protestantism as a church was born 22 November 1830 at St. John’s Church in Baltimore, Maryland. By 1858, the M. P.s claimed about 20,000 members in thirty-one conferences, with the vast majority of the membership in the region.

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4I am greatly indebted to Roland Kircher, Librarian at Wesley theological Seminary in Washington D.C., for his generous assistance in locating original records and publications of the Methodist Protestant Church which are deposited in the Seminary archives. I also received helpful suggestions from Joyce Moore, Houghton (N.Y.) College Librarian, in locating Wesleyan Church materials and from William Miller of Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City for providing copies of The American Wesleyan.

5Abel Stevens on “Methodist Separations” in The Advocate and Journal, 5 May 1858.

6The W.M. newspaper was originally The True Wesleyan 1843-50, The American Wesleyan 1851-1865, and finally The Wesleyan 1865-1883.
between West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and the Delmarva Peninsula. The Wesleyans, on the other hand, reflected a moral discontent within northern Methodism over the issue of the continued toleration of slaveholding. After the M. E. General Conference of 1836 when the Bishops advised silence on the subject of abolition, antislave activists began to organize and publicly criticize the M. E. Church for its stance; consequently, many of them were removed from pastoral responsibilities in several conferences. Following a call to form a Methodist Church free from slavery and episcopacy, this second body of reformers in February 1843 organized the Wesleyan Methodist Connection at Andover, Massachusetts. It was estimated that by 1856 there were about 20,000 Wesleyans distributed in eighteen conferences from New England to Illinois to the Carolinas.

The initial catalyst for union discussion came in the form of a Wesleyan Methodist General Conference invitation to other churches holding the same doctrine to engage in discussions about church union. Further, the Conference appointed a Committee on Fraternal Relations which was charged with the responsibility of opening negotiations with interested parties. What precisely the Wesleyans had in mind in their action may not be known with certainty; however, by inference, we can gather that the thrust of their ecumenicity was aggressively moral. As one editorial advised,

we will meet any similar committee from the branches of Methodism, or any others, and make all reasonable efforts to agree upon a common line or march, where we can move on together to the victories of truth.

It is not unfair to suggest that generally Wesleyans were by their invitation seeking to enlist greater numbers in their crusade to overthrow slavery both in Methodism and the nation at large. Specifically, there was also a coterie of Wesleyan leaders who were deeply committed to unionism, even beyond the moral questions.

The Wesleyan Committee, led by Lucius C. Matlack, proceeded to take the next step on a regional level. Following an announcement by the Northern Illinois Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church

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9*The American Wesleyan*, 7 July 1858.
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which denounced slavery, Matlack and his committee met in spring 1858 with a similar Northern Illinois M.P. committee to discuss the possibilities of uniting the two annual conferences into one body. By September the same year, similar regional discussions were being launched among the respective church conferences in Michigan, Ohio, New York, and Pennsylvania. The Wesleyan Committee on Fraternal Relations thus recommended in an interim report of 10 October 1858 that a general convention be called to bring together all of the forces—Wesleyan and Protestant—which favored union.10

In the meanwhile, important developments were occurring within the ranks of the Methodist Protestants. In recognition of the growing disaffection of M.P.s in the north and west over the issue of slavery, the northern and western conferences of the church planned a convention at Springfield, Ohio to amend the constitution of the church to rid it of all recognition of slavery. On 10 November 1859 in an atmosphere of “devout impulse to meet a crisis” forty-four delegates, led by Ancel Bassett and George Williams, revised the Discipline (striking all references to slavery), strengthened the stature of the church paper The Western Methodist Protestant, planned for Pacific Coast missionary work, and authorized union conversations with the Wesleyans.11 Upon hearing this news, the Wesleyan Committee expressed jubilation and called upon the Protestants to meet them at a full, delegate convention the following year to proceed with general union details. Following such a convention, it was agreed that any plan of union would have to be approved by the several annual conferences.12

There were also practical considerations involved in the M.P. unionist posture. From the founding of the Wesleyan Connection, reports had been circulated about denominational competition and Methodist Protestant membership losses. “All over the North and West,” opined one conference president, “societies and individuals have left us, and sought other church relations, rather than be in church fellowship with slave-holders.” Some conferences lost thousands of members directly to the Wesleyans, as in Michigan; one-half of the Vermont Conference plus the entire Champlain (N.Y.) Conference transferred to the antislavery Connection.13 At the M. P. General Conference sessions in 1858 the northern and western wings of the church resolved not to continue in fellowship with the eastern and

10The American Wesleyan, 10 October 1858.
11Bassett, M.P. History . . . , p. 220, recounts the struggle over antislavery in Methodist Protestantism from an eyewitness perspective.
12This turned out to be an important procedural difference between the two groups. Protestants would act upon union at the General Conference level, while Wesleyans would take the more difficult route of the individual and highly differential annual conferences. See MacLeister, Wesleyan History . . . , p. 77.
13Bassett, M.P. History . . . , p. 188.
southern conferences while they witnessed the dissolution of their church in the north. Although the northern Methodist Protestants expressed a good deal of pride in their liberated identity in 1858, many like Ancel Bassett recognized that the present course of action had only forestalled otherwise tragic results.14

The Wesleyans were less enthusiastic and began in early 1859 to divide into two camps on the matter. Very much in favor of a union with the M. P.s were several of the ranking leaders of the group: Luther Lee, Lucius Matlack, Leroy Sunderland, and Cyrus Prindle. Each in this group had been part of the Methodist Episcopal tradition prior to joining the forces of Orange Scott in 1843, and none had any prior connections with Methodist Protestantism. Further, each was connected with literary or educational pursuits and was respected for his intellectual abilities. Finally, each was located in a region where union sentiment was strong, and positive contacts had been made with the Protestants.15 A second group, somewhat less well-defined, expressed opposition to union at the local church and annual conference levels. A great fear among them was loss of itinerancy to a congregational style of polity. Since most Wesleyan churches were rural and lacked great resources, it was important to maintain changing pastoral assignments and circuit arrangements. Still others opposed union on the grounds that a merger would destroy the public confidence in the purposes of the Connection and thus jeopardize the struggle against slavery. Third, much Wesleyan opposition came from areas of the church where the membership was sui generis, that is, in Ohio, western Pennsylvania, and New York, and the Carolinas where Wesleyanism had evolved with fewer transfers from Methodist Protestantism or any other sect.16 In these areas there was a deep sense of pride and ownership in the name and the Connection.

Apparently, Matlack, Lee and Prindle believed the key to success of the union proposals was positive publicity. Matlack visited most annual

14Bassett, M.P. History . . . , p. 190.
15For basic vocational data on these individuals, see my article, “The Fruits of a Crusade: Wesleyan Opposition to Secret Societies,” Methodist History, XVII, No. 4 (July 1979), pp. 239-52. Luther Lee taught philosophy and theology at Adrian College in Michigan, Lucius Matlack taught and presided briefly over Wheaton (Ill.) College; both joined Leroy Sunderland and Cyrus Prindle in editing the denominational newspaper. Their original Wesleyan conferences were as follows: Lee - Michigan, Matlack - Illinois, Sunderland - Ohio, and Prindle - New York.
16In one western section of New York and Pennsylvania, Wesleyan Methodist work had grown strong from basic evangelism and church planting conducted in remote hamlets which other groups had neglected. Church development in North Carolina was the direct result of domestic missionary labor in the 1840s as the General Conference commissioned young preachers like Adam Crooks to itinerate in the South. (During the War, these associations remained loyal to the Union.) See Elizabeth W. Crooks, Life of Adam Crooks, A.M. (Syracuse: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 115-17.
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conference meetings in 1858-59, Lee wrote extensive articles on the secret society question (which disturbed many in New York and Pennsylvania) and Prindle valiantly defended the prospects of union as editor of the church paper. Matlack probably absorbed more criticism than the others since he was actively advocating the plan at public gatherings of both groups throughout 1858 and 1859. His most vocal critics were in western Pennsylvania and Ohio where he was accused of “begging for union” and wanting to join his church to another “at any cost.”

The first general and formal meetings between the M.P.s and the Wesleyans were held at the First Methodist Protestant Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 18-20 February 1859. The Committee of Conference, as it was called, brought together the two great spokesmen for union, Ancel Bassett of the Protestants and Cyrus Prindle of the Wesleyans, who achieved a remarkable degree of unanimity in the joint plan they proposed. Among its provisions, the plan recommended combined efforts in revivals and quarterly meetings, encouragement to non-resident members to unite with the geographically closest church, filling of vacant charges by the ministry of the other church, and an exchange of fraternal delegates at regional gatherings of each tradition. Finally, and as an ultimate symbol of unity, a joint hymnal was proposed for publication in 1860. At the close of the Committee sessions, it was decided to refer the plan to the respective General Conferences which were scheduled for 1860.

The report from the joint meetings at Pittsburgh met with mixed results. In the six annual conference meetings among Wesleyans in the spring of 1859, there was unanimous support for “cooperation” and continued discussion. Observers noted, however, that small minorities of opposition were quite vocal and intended to fight what they thought to be “too quick a plan.” Although an Illinois Wesleyan pastor advocated the new name “United Methodist Brethren,” others to the east strongly intoned the secret society issue as a point upon which there could be no compromise. Further, the Book Agent of the Connection reported that he could not recommend the new hymnal without the consent of the General Conference. In response to Wesleyan backpeddling, the Protestants recognized that haste could jeopardize completely the overall plan and, therefore, deliberated at their 1860 and 1862 Conventions upon matters of finance and education. In 1860 plans were laid to expand the Book Concern and to hire Ancel Bassett as the permanent editor; in 1862 concern

17The American Wesleyan, 13 July 1859.
19Bassett, M. P. Hstory . . . , p. 228.
for collegiate education dominated the discussions, along with flagging receipts due to the general upheaval caused by civil and military strife in much of the Protestants' territory. Most agreed with Cyrus Prindle when he declared after canvassing his constituency, that "union cannot be effected at present," in large measure due to the greater political and moral issues of the day. Thus, the first phase of the union dialogues ended with the burden for continuation being placed upon local and regional cooperative plans and institutions.

The Second Phase: A Union of all Episcopal Methodists

Let us remember the occasion for these several secessions from our Church. The Wesleyans left us because we were not antislavery enough; surely that is a difficulty no more. The Protestants left us chiefly because we had no lay representation; but lay representation is the manifest destiny of our church . . . the Free Methodist Church was a secession on the ground that we had lost the fervor and simplicity of old Methodism . . . The Independent Churches have generally grown out of local difficulties . . . and primitive Methodism would readily yield to the gentle pressure. We say, therefore, that we will rejoice in the union of non-Episcopal Methodism, for it is at least a step toward the union of all American Methodism.

As presumptuous as this Methodist Episcopal editorial sounds in the ears of the "come-outer tradition" it was not far from true in the minds of some non-Episcopal Methodists following the Civil War. Several Methodist histories treat this era as preeminently one of union discussions because important communications were passed among the various branches of Methodism. Illustrative of this trend, the two divisions of Episcopal Methodism unofficially reopened talks, both branches of the Methodist Protestant Church discussed joining the regionally respective branches of the M.E. Church, the Wesleyans corresponded with the United Brethren, and finally the dialogue between the Wesleyans and the Protestants entered a new phase which would involve Free, Independent and Primitive Methodists toward a possible non-Episcopal Methodist Church. Thus Methodism in general would enjoy at least a brief period of unprecedented family good will as the War between the States concluded.

Just as Cyrus Prindle pronounced in 1859 that union was not yet possible between the Wesleyans and Protestants, another stage of seemingly positive relationships between them was evolving in a Michigan college.

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21The American Wesleyan, 18 May 1859.
22Editorial, "Non-Episcopal Methodists" in The Methodist Protestant, 22 July 1865, in which a commentary on the M.E. Church resolution was presented as quoted from M. E. sources. The Methodist Protestant, published at Baltimore, was the official denominational paper for the Eastern and Southern Conferences. The Western Methodist Protestant, edited by Ancel Bassett, served the same purpose for the Northern and Western Conferences. Few issues of the latter are known to exist.
Upon invitation from local townspeople in 1852, Wesleyan Methodists founded Adrian College and agreed to raise a substantial sum for its endowment. Although the college program moved ahead as planned, the financial situation remained bleak; thus, in 1860 the college trustees (who were aware of the union discussion) requested assistance from the Methodist Protestants who were themselves searching for a prime collegiate location.\(^{23}\) The M.P.s responded by organizing a voluntary educational association which successfully oversubscribed the endowment and ensured the future of the college. Several M.P. trustees were added to the Board and a prominent natural scientist, also a Protestant, joined the faculty.\(^{24}\) Although by 1864 the college was judged to be solvent, the Wesleyan General Conference which met that year in Adrian expressed no great fondness for the merger plans, some delegates believing that their school had been stolen by the Protestants.\(^{25}\) What could have been a prototype of general union eventuated into a negative catalyst which stirred up bitter feelings against any union in the upper Great Lakes region.

Following a preliminary convention of non-Episcopal Methodists in Cleveland in June 1865 in which Cyrus Prindle and Lucius Matlack were the principal actors,\(^{26}\) the culmination of union efforts came in the seven day meetings at Cincinnati, 9-16 May 1866. As planned, the parties involved were the Methodist Protestants, Wesleyan Methodists, Independent Methodists, and observers from various other Methodist-related groups; numerically, the breakdown was as follows: Protestants, 138; Wesleyans, 38; Independents, 6.\(^{27}\) In the period between the Cleveland and Cincinnati Conventions, Hiram Mattison, the leader of the Independent Methodists, had withdrawn from the plans to rejoin the Methodist Episcopal Church and B. T. Roberts of the Free Methodists declined to join the Cincinnati delegates for fear that the episcopacy would be restored eventually to the united church.\(^{28}\) After all of the congenial wooing of

\(^{23}\)There are three official accounts of the Adrian College saga, each with obvious biases. Compare MacLeister, *Wesleyan History* . . . , pp. 229-31, with Bassett, *M. P. History* . . . , pp. 238-39, with *The Wesleyan*, 28 March and 18 April 1866 wherein a complete account of the Trustee resolutions is printed.

\(^{24}\)Bassett, *M. P. History* . . . , p. 239. The scientist (also an M.P.), John Kost, agreed to donate his extensive natural history collection to the school on the proviso that union with the Protestants be permanent.


\(^{27}\)Drinkhouse, *Methodist Reform* . . . , Vol. II, pp. 472-80, contains a digest of the Cincinnati Convention proceedings which he edited from original manuscripts, long since lost.

\(^{28}\)Hiram Mattison (1811-68) who had been a well-known figure among Methodist abolitionists in New York City, surprised everyone with his return to the M. E. Church. Predictably, Roberts still vividly recalled the lay preacher-episcopal struggles in New York which had led to his own separation. His views on the present controversy may be found in an editorial in *The Methodist Protestant*, 28 October 1865, wherein he compared the “come-outer” to “Lilliputians” in the face of the “giant” Episcopalians.
several other groups, the Protestants and Wesleyans constituted the actual proceedings.

During the week of meetings, papers were read on several relevant subjects including the civil state of the nation, membership in secret societies, the makings of a General Conference and a Discipline. One observer recalled that since the Methodist Protestants outnumbered the Wesleyans, the Protestant articles of faith basically served as the foundation of most discussions of theology and polity. This would help to explain why it was the Wesleyans who debated most vocally the issues where there seemed to be most marked deviation from their own position while the Protestants were silent in the records. On the issue of secret societies, the delegates resolved to leave the matter up to the individual churches; it was further agreed not to vote by denominations on the Basis of Union itself, and finally, the name which the Wesleyans proposed—a United Methodist Church—was defeated by the simple title, “Methodist Church.” Committees were set up to implement the Union in the respective existing General Conferences, to call the first Uniting Conference, to write a Discipline, to invite the participation of the Primitive Methodists, the United Brethren and the Evangelical Association, and to correspond with leaders of the M.E. Church concerning the Centenary of American Methodism. The Convention concluded in all hopes of ratification by the Methodist Protestant General Conference and the several annual conferences of the Wesleyan Connection.

When news of the merger plans reached the trustees of Adrian College, they responded by arranging for a fuller relationship with the new ecclesiastical structure, thereby committing the college to the proposals. The basic reason for the seemingly premature action of the trustees was the action of the Methodist Protestant Educational Association in agreeing to support the school as its primary educational venture. Although the prominent Adrian faculty member, Luther Lee (a Wesleyan), worked hard to dispel the erroneous rumors circulating about the role of the college to the M.P.s, Michigan Wesleyans held an ad hoc meeting at Egypt, Michigan to forestall unionism in both the college and the Connection. Adrian thus became a cause celebre of the perceived losses which the Wesleyans would encounter should union be ratified.

29Drinkhouse, Methodist Reform... Vol. II, esp. pp. 474-75 for a report on the debates on secret societies and other moral issues. The contemporary version in The Methodist Protestant, 2 June 1866, omitted nearly all references to disagreements about moral issues.

30After a stiff debate, the Wesleyans lost the battle for parity in voting rights, probably because so few of them actually attended the meetings. Protestants opposed the name “United Methodist Church,” offered by Cyrus Prindle, in order to leave open the opportunity for the Free and Primitive Methodists to join later on an equal footing. See The American Wesleyan, 16 May 1866. The idea to correspond with the M. E. Church about the Centenary was undoubtedly Prindle’s also.
Another threat to union in 1866 was the growing impression among many Wesleyans that the proposals were a disguised attempt to unite with the M.E. Church. A contemporary historian recalled that L. C. Matlack "gave intimation from time to time that with three or four other prominent ministers ... he was present to watch the course of events and to give, if possible, a trend to the General Convention that would commit it to general Methodistic Union, as proposed by the last General Conference of the M.E. Church." Further, it was known among the Wesleyans, that Matlack was visiting M.E. Church gatherings to speak in stirring oratory about the possibility of rejoining the parent body. The response to Matlack in *The Wesleyan* was pointed: "We will not believe ... that Episcopacy was not a reason for secession from the M.E. Church and a reason for not returning to it."

A third difficulty for Wesleyans was the secret society question. In a series of well-reasoned editorials early in 1866, Luther Lee went to great efforts to demonstrate to his fellow Wesleyans that the Connection could not expect to prosper with the continuation of a general rule against secret associations. Lee argued that the Connection had been organized on a distinct antislavery basis and not as an anti-secret society fraternity. Further, he pointed out that while Wesleyans have opposed such societies, lodge memberships had steadily increased. Lee found the response to his editorials to be "so extreme, so violent and so censorious, that no peace can be kept with my opponents." Growing numbers of Wesleyans held that the issue was not one to be dealt with in a minor statement of local church polity, but a deeply significant *moral* issue.

What was more difficult to identify than the problems raised by Adrian College, hypothetical merger with the M.E. Church or secret societies, was the subtle but definite change in the ethos of the Wesleyan movement. Undoubtedly, Wesleyans had from the beginning perceived themselves as a socio-moral reform crusade; however, in the 1860s there is evidence that new leadership became more intensely and generally ultraistic and sectarian than the originators of the Connection had intended. In contrast to Luther

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1 Much more was made of the "Egypt Convention" than actually transpired. The "convention" was an informal meeting in March 1866 of those opposed to M. P. interference with Adrian College; erroneous statements about the sale of college properties were issued and Luther Lee was targeted as one who was spearheading the "un holy alliance." Lee's pointed responses are found in *The American Wesleyan*, 28 March and 18 April 1866.


3 Adam Crooks, editor of *The Wesleyan*, reported in the 28 March 1866 issue on Matlack's address to the New York City Methodist Preacher's Conference. A strong denunciation of Matlack and episcopacy appeared two weeks later in the 11 April 1866 issue as a letter from a concerned local preacher.

4 Brackney, "Fruits of a Crusade," p. 250; *The Wesleyan*, 25 April 1866. Lee's argument was tenuous at best, since a rule against secret societies had been part of the Wesleyan platform from the beginning.
Lee's position that Wesleyans constituted a "Connection" or a moral conscience to influence the greater Methodist family, others came to see Wesleyan Methodism as a "permanent vanguard for God in moral achievements." The leader of the new ultraism was Adam Crooks, a middle-aged pastor from Cleveland who was elected Connectional Editor in 1864. In his first editorial, he revealed a tendency toward the recent holiness movement as he wrote:

The primal objects of the American Wesleyan should be the success of Christian enterprise—the spread of scriptural holiness over these lands—consisting of piety and purity, correct faith, genuine experience, and corresponding practice. 'Holiness unto the Lord' should radiate from every issue.35

At the time of his election to the editorship, Crooks was a well-known Cleveland pastor who inveighed heavily against vice and promoted city-wide revival in the spirit of the holiness crusades of 1858.

Adam Crooks moved quickly to become the chief foe against the unionists. On principle he was vehemently opposed to merger with the M. P. s since he had left that tradition on grounds of moral conscience several decades previously. Further, Crooks was convinced that the entire union discussion was productive of nothing more than dissension and strife. In his instantaneous reporting of the Cincinnati Convention (which included minute details of the debates of moral issues), Crooks asserted that the gathering "did but little to conciliate the convictions and wishes of a majority of the ministers and members of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection."36 When news of the Wesleyan opinions reached Methodist Protestants, the leadership expressed dismay and responded that Crooks' accounts of the Convention were premature and placed the most unfavorable construction on the acts of the Convention.37

As the fall annual conference meetings were held among the Wesleyans, one region after another expressed doubts about the wisdom of merger. The initial of these sessions, held in the Central Ohio Conference, was probably the most significant: "... after a full and free discussion of union with other Christian bodies, we deem it our duty to adhere with fidelity to our present organization." In yet another series of hearings, one of the Convention delegates believed that "mainly the Convention was made up of men of years and titles whose battles are mainly fought

36The Wesleyan, 13 June 1866.
37The Methodist Protestant, 4 July 1866. Crooks was convinced that unionism was a plot engineered by a few leaders and far from being the spontaneous feeling of the Connection: The Wesleyan, 30 May 1866.
... they had come prepared to concede anything for the sake of union."

Increasingly, the symbols of distaste were clerical elitism and the secret society rule, which for most Wesleyans constituted a moral breach of the true law of Christ.

The climax of Wesleyan division occurred in October 1866 when Cyrus Prindle resigned his administrative post as General Agent and Adam Crooks was elected his replacement. Prindle, Matlack, and Lee had become the targets for increasingly bitter attacks in the churches and the press as the triad moved closer to advocating not only a non-episcopal union but possible reunion with the M.E. Church in the north. Apparently in response to personal overtures made to Prindle himself, the Wesleyan reformer confessed to his colleagues, "if the M.E. Church were to secure the Lay element in their Conferences, there is no question growing out of the Episcopacy as it is, that would constitute a fatal barrier to my union with her." Following the lead of Prindle, Luther Lee penned his final editorial on the secret society issue in which he asserted that he was "not disposed to be held longer in such relations of visible and terrible inconsistency, without one grand struggle to free myself." But the impending loss of three of the leading founders of the Connection did not daunt the moral crusade which Adam Crooks and growing numbers of Wesleyans sustained to bolster denominational unity and continuation. To the credit of the ultraists, by November 1866, the question of union was permanently silenced among the Wesleyan Methodists. As one relieved lay preacher put it, "hereafter The Wesleyan will be welcomed to our homes freighted with revival notices and such other religious reading as will encourage, strengthen and revive the drooping spirits of our people."

**Epilogue — Reunion**

Especially we would rejoice if there could be a general union of all Methodists who agree in doctrine, and who are loyal to the General Government, and who are opposed to the evil of slavery, in the approaching Centenary of Methodism, which occurs in 1866.

According to the plan, the western and northern conferences of the Methodist Protestant church proceeded to reorganize as "The Methodist Church." At a final meeting of the M.P. General Convention in November

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38 *The Wesleyan*, 13 June and 20 June 1866. In the latter source there is an obvious age bias as another younger lay preacher attacked the "old guard" leaders, Matlack, Lee, and Prindle.


40 *The Wesleyan*, 2 May 1866.

41 Crooks and his following used editorials, protracted meetings and exaggerated accounts of internal dissension in the Connection to build their case for rejection of the union proposals. See *The Wesleyan*, 21 November 1866; for the influence of perfectionism on Crooks, "Union Among Methodists," 11 April 1866.

42 The Bishops' message was reported in *The Methodist Protestant*, 22 July 1865.
1866, the way for reorganization was cleared for the new church to become a reality. While much of the Wesleyan support was eroding rapidly, Luther Lee assisted in creating a Discipline as did Cyrus Prindle in other matters of implementation. It was generally believed among the Protestants that eventually many Wesleyan congregations would be brought into the union as a result of the positive influence of leaders like Lee, Matlack, and Prindle.

The first General Conference of the Methodist Church met 15-22 May 1867 in Cleveland, Ohio at the Wesleyan church of that city, in an obvious attempt to become more than a resuscitated M. P. Church. Of the forty-one delegates present, only seven were Wesleyans, with but a minority pledged to the scheme. In addition to adopting a Discipline and Articles of Faith, the delegates agreed to transfer most of the western M. P. machinery to the successor church and to pursue new parish and mission developments. Significantly, Adrian College was accepted as a special educational concern and the delegates agreed upon educational standards for the ministry which included examination by an annual conference and, if possible, a reading knowledge of the Scriptures in the original language. No rule on secret societies was adopted as those present agreed to avoid legislation upon such matters. Ironically, while there was no certainty about future Wesleyan involvement in the venture, most observers believed that a final and complete break with the southern and eastern conferences of the M. P. Church had been effected.

Three further General Conferences of the Methodist Church would be held until in 1877 the Church reunited with the eastern and southern conferences to become again the Methodist Protestant Church. At first, the southern conferences had hardened their own identity and determined "to hold fast that which is good" in view of the northern/western shifts, but by 1871 fraternal messengers were being exchanged and union negotiations were under consideration for both M. P. branches with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, North, and each other. In the
roughly ten years of its existence, the Methodist Church experienced a
modest growth rate, enlarged its publishing and missions operations and
centralized its administrative duties at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{47} The
college program at Adrian—the one tangible result of union—was fur­
ther expanded and legally held to be in the title of the Methodist Church.
The latter action was strenuously opposed by most of the Wesleyan faculty
at the school and the Michigan conference of that church attempted on
several occasions to wrest the school free from both the union church and
financial stability. Now under new solidarity leadership, the Wesleyan
Methodist Church tried unsuccessfully over several years to obtain a finan-
cial settlement whereby all monies which had been contributed to Adrian
by Wesleyans would be restored to that denomination.\textsuperscript{48}

If the Protestants were disappointed that Wesleyans had retreated
from the union church, many were deeply chagrined to learn that those
same Wesleyans who had promoted non-Episcopal Methodism had in fact
reunited with the Methodist Episcopal Church! John Scott, an obviously
biased observer, later recalled his amazement at the course taken by Luther
Lee:

\begin{quote}
I had been in correspondence with Dr. Luther Lee until within a week of our General
Conference, and he still professed great devotion to the union movement . . . before
our Conference was over, I heard that he had returned to the Methodist Episcopal
Church. I was never more shocked in my life . . . I had esteemed him very highly,
but he disappointed me sorely.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

Between February and June 1866 several Wesleyans had in fact returned
to their original church, among whom were Lee, Matlack, and Prindle.
At least part of the reason claimed for their action was the failure of the
Wesleyan Church to ratify plans to unite with the Protestants. But, there
were deeper reasons.

When the "peculiar institution" had been abolished by law the original
Wesleyan reformers felt no obligation to continue a sectarian stance: "In
my judgement," reasoned Lucius Matlack, "all real antagonism, between
the parent body and its branches, is cancelled, or is in the process of ad­
justment. And I think there is no violation of principle nor of fraternal
feeling necessarily involved in changing personal relations."\textsuperscript{50} To the quiet
relief of the new Wesleyan leaders, it was reported that in little over a

\textsuperscript{47}Bassett, \textit{M. P. History} . . . , pp. 251-71; Drinkhouse, \textit{Methodist Reform} . . . , Vol. II,
pp. 499, 502 indicates an overall growth to about 50,000 with some dissension in the West
over misappropriation of the name, "Methodist."

\textsuperscript{48}Jennings, \textit{American Wesleyanism} . . . , p. 86, accused the Protestants of "acting like men
of the world" and thus teaching the Wesleyans a bitter lesson.

\textsuperscript{49}Drinkhouse, \textit{Methodist Reform} . . . , Vol. II, p. 481, quotes John Scott, a longtime leader
in the union dialogue, as saying that he was so disappointed in Lee that he gave away all
of the latter's books which Scott had previously relied upon for interpretations of Methodistic
theology.
year, as by an invisible but omnipotent hand . . . Lee is settled in purpose
to go into the Union, Matlack equally purposed to go to the M. E. Church
and Prindle is standing between these extremes hesitant and awaiting the
openings of Providence.51

Behind all of the discussions of contemporary issues and doctrine,
lay one other event which spoke importantly to those of a larger denomina­
tional spirit. The one-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first
Methodists in America in 1766 was approaching and in an act of genuine
good will, the M. E. bishops not only invited the “come-outer” groups
to consider the progress which the mother church had made, but also to
discuss specific union possibilities at the regional and annual conference
levels.52 While this invitation repulsed the more ardent reformers of the
second generation (principally the later Wesleyans and Free Methodists),
it actually served to instill a new denominational spirit among Methodist
Protestants, now the Methodist Church, and those Wesleyans who had
once served in the M. E. Church. As George Brown, author of the
M.P./W.M. hymnal, reflected on this “era of good feelings among
Methodists” in a letter to the bishops of the M.E. Church, “No gentleman
shall hold out his hand to me and be refused a shake of mine. I hold these
bishops and the members of the Central Centenary Committee to be
gentlemen. They have held out their hands, and I hope we will hold out
ours, and talk over the possibility of a future union.”53 A few of the leading
dissenters, Lucius Matlack, Luther Lee, and Cyrus Prindle, did shake
hands and agreed that the time had arrived for each to rejoin the
evangelical march of Methodism.

While Wesleyan Methodists and Methodist Protestants could not
agree that organic union was possible in the 1860s, they did demonstrate
that members of the greater Methodist family have a deep sense of singular
heritage which in the late nineteenth century drew them to discuss com­
monalities and cooperation. More than just a common polity (about which
the “come-outers” differed greatly), Wesleyans and Protestants joined the
parent church in affirming the primary relevance of John Wesley and the
peculiar admixture of evangelism and social concern characteristic of the
Methodist tradition. In keeping with the one-hundredth anniversary of

50The other reformers might well have agreed. Compare Orange Scott, The Grounds of Seces­
sion from the Methodist Episcopal Church (Syracuse: L. C. Matlack 1849), p. 24, and Luther
Lee’s Wesleyan Manual: A Defense of the Organization of the Wesleyan Methodist Con­
nection (Syracuse: Samuel Lee, 1862), with Lucius C. Matlack, Secession: A Personal Nar­
51The American Wesleyan, 3 April 1867. Matlack joined the Philadelphia Conference, Lee
the Detroit Conference, and Prindle the Ohio Conference of the M. E. Church. For details
of the individual reunions, see the respective annual conference minutes for the year 1867
and Margaret B. MacMillan, The Methodist Church in Michigan: The Nineteenth Century
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), pp. 242-43; the latter deals especially with Luther Lee’s
“post-Wesleyan” career.
Methodism in the United States, a "come-outer" probably described best the bond which unites the heirs of Mr. Wesley:

Methodism is God's most effectual method of saving the lost among men, and whereas this is the one-hundredth year of Methodism in America . . . we recommend celebrating it in the highest religious sense, with prayer, thanksgiving, praise and good works.54

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52 *The Methodist Protestant*, 9 June 1866; Bucke, *American Methodism . . .*, Vol. II, pp. 394-402. There was basic uncertainty about the exact date of the arrival of the first Methodists in America. The M. E. Bishops designated 1866 as the Centenary Year and held a "Missionary Anniversary Conference" in Baltimore, and "to invite all Methodist bodies to unite in the celebrations." See *The American Wesleyan*, 31 January and 11 April 1866.

53 *The Methodist Protestant*, 9 June 1866.

54 *The Wesleyan*, 11 April 1866.