CONTRIBUTORS

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THE RISE OF THE NEW ENGLAND METHODIST TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT, 1823-1836

Douglas J. Williamson

With respect to the issue of human consumption of alcoholic beverages, the 1976 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church states: "We affirm our longstanding abstinence from alcohol as a faithful witness to God’s liberating and redeeming love for persons." When I happened upon this doctrinal statement I had already become engrossed in an investigation of the life and works of the Reverend Wilbur Fisk (1792-1839). In the 1820s and 1830s Fisk provided stalwart leadership for New England Methodism, both in doctrinal controversies and social reform. Temperance reform was one of the causes in which Fisk most diligently exerted his leadership. The subject of the following paper has, therefore, grown and developed from an initial interest in the role of Wilbur Fisk in the detailed history underlying the modern American Methodist position concerning alcoholic beverages.

Minimal investigation revealed that the only available historical work dealing exclusively with Methodist temperance reform efforts has been Methodism and the Temperance Reformation, written by the Reverend Henry Wheeler in 1882. Wheeler, however, focused primarily upon the development of the official Methodist Episcopal position on the "alcohol question," and not upon the techniques and arguments used to buttress the temperance movement in its early years. In recent years, Richard M. Cameron's Methodism and Society in Historical Perspective and Frederick Norwood's The Story of American Methodism have provided a clearer understanding of the intriguing heritage of the American Methodist temperance movement. Nevertheless, no one has captured the sense of urgency and the fervor with which the problem of intemperance was confronted by many Methodists in the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century.

Additional research uncovered the important role played by the New England Conference in early nineteenth century Methodist temperance reform. This revelation led me to peruse the pages of Zion's Herald, the Methodist newspaper published in Boston (and for a few years, in New York) beginning in 1823. The Herald became my chief research tool for two reasons: first, since the primary contributors to the Herald were New
England Methodist ministers, the paper has preserved sincere, emotional, and thoughtful contemporary appraisals of the most pressing issues of the day; and second, since the Herald was funded by the New England Conference, it was obliged to represent and advocate the views of the members of that Conference, and therefore provides insights into the evolution of conference policies. Although I have also utilized journals containing minutes of the New England annual conferences, the conclusions drawn from my research have been based fundamentally upon insights gleaned from the pages of Zion's Herald.

There have been some minor problems involved with relying upon Zion's Herald as my fundamental research tool. The first problem occurred when I discovered that in 1828 the trustees of Wesleyan Academy (who at that time shouldered financial responsibility for the paper) had sold the paper to the Book Concern, an agency of the Methodist Episcopal General Conference. The motivation underlying the sale was a desire for the church to have one weekly publication to represent all of the annual conferences, thereby eliminating all regional papers. Hence, between September 5, 1828 and August 31, 1833 the newspaper was entitled Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion's Herald. Many New England Methodists continued to contribute letters and articles to the paper during this time. But the concentration of New England Methodist-authored pieces was distinctly diminished, thereby limiting my primary source data.

The other problem that has emerged because of my primary reliance upon Zion's Herald has been my inability to locate all issues of the Herald published between January and August of 1831. Similarly, the New England Christian Herald, published between July, 1831 and August, 1833, has not been available to me. This paper would have been helpful since it was published under the direction of the New England Conference until Zion's Herald returned to Boston in August, 1833. My investigations have led me to believe that the most important years in the early stages of the New England Methodist temperance movement coincided with those years in which Zion's Herald was published in Boston. Other primary source materials corroborate this judgment, but this conclusion has undoubtedly been greatly influenced by my extensive work with Zion's Herald.

It is important to attempt to identify the scope of the contributors and subscribers to Zion's Herald in the period under scrutiny herein. Until the paper was removed to New York City in 1828 it was "published for the New England and Maine Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church." This quotation from the masthead of the weekly provides an accurate assessment of the audience that the editors of the paper attempted to reach. News from throughout New England was published in the Herald (along with "national" news). Judging from the letters written to the paper, and from its occasional listing of subscribers, most readers were New England Methodists. It is worth mentioning that some members of every denomination closely scrutinized the journalistic offerings of all other denominations — and this afforded Zion's Herald at least a small audience outside of the New England Methodist connection. By the time the Herald had resumed publication in Boston in 1833, the New England Conference included only the states of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. The two new annual conferences were the Maine Conference and the New Hampshire Conference (which included Vermont). Although the masthead had come to read "Published by the Boston Wesleyan Association, under the patronage of the New England Conference," the paper truly represented the interests of all New England Methodists (lists of subscribers still included many persons from northern parts of New England).

Two other points need to be made before I proceed to the main text of this paper. Initially, I should indicate that I have had no means for verifying the "facts" referred to by many contributors to the Herald when they are discussing the numbers of drunkards or reformed drunkards in a particular town or region at any given time. These numbers may well be accurate, or they may be the product of the individual's wishful thinking, personal experience, estimating, or second-hand knowledge. The figures could not in any case be verified. What is obviously more important is the context in which such figures appear and the motivation underlying their use in that context.

Secondly, I have chosen to approach the early years of the New England Methodist temperance movement chronologically. I hope this approach will enable the reader to capture the development of the movement. Such an approach should also indicate the very rapid intensification of the early nineteenth century Methodist opposition to "spiritsuous liquors" and "ardent spirits."

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"No evil is more dangerous, or attended with more fatal consequences than drunkenness, and yet no evil is extending itself more rapidly through every grade of society." When this statement appeared in the editorial column of Zion's Herald in January, 1823, New England Methodists were expressing little or no concern about the social and cultural problem of intemperance. However, by 1836 New England Methodism had become the leading force in American Methodist temperance reform, and the pages of Zion's Herald were filled with editorials, lectures, anecdotes, poetry, and letters supporting the battle against

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“No evil is more dangerous, or attended with more fatal consequences than drunkenness, and yet no evil is extending itself more rapidly through every grade of society.”1 When this statement appeared in the editorial column of Zion’s Herald in January, 1823, New England Methodists were expressing little or no concern about the social and cultural problem of intemperance. However, by 1836 New England Methodism had become the leading force in American Methodist temperance reform, and the pages of Zion’s Herald were filled with editorials, lectures, anecdotes, poetry, and letters supporting the battle against

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eliminated the prohibition upon buying and selling liquor, and dropped the word “extreme” from the remainder of the rule.

By 1790 the social custom of drinking distilled liquor and fermented beverages had become deeply interwoven in the fabric of American life, including the life of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The official Methodist policy was still intended to discourage church members from the consumption of liquor, but the policy could not be successfully enforced. This was true largely for two reasons. First, the manufacture and sale of liquor had become a profitable business, especially in the frontier regions in which Methodism had its greatest strength. Second, as contemporary minister J.B. Finley testified,

Ardent spirits were used as a preventive of disease. It was also regarded as a necessary beverage. A house could not be raised, a field of wheat cut down, nor could there be a log-rolling, a husking, a quilting, a wedding, or a funeral without the aid of alcohol. In this state of things there was a great laxity on the subject of drinking, and the ministers as well as the members of some denominations indulged freely.*

Between 1790 and 1848 the general rules of the Methodist Episcopal Church prohibited the use of intoxicating liquors, except in cases of necessity, but social customs of the early nineteenth century enabled many Methodists to interpret “necessity” broadly. Before the temperance movement of the 1820s produced a more narrow interpretation of that term, American Methodists freely consumed, manufactured, and traded in intoxicating beverages.

At the General Conference of 1812, delegate James Axley introduced the following resolution: “Resolved. That no stationed or local preacher shall retail spirituous or malt liquors without forfeiting his ministerial character among us.” Both the introduction and the eventual defeat of Axley’s motion would appear to indicate that Methodist preachers were involved in liquor trade. By the 1816 General Conference, however, there was some indication of renewed vigor in the Methodist temperance movement, since Axley’s motion, minus the words “or malt” was passed by the conference.

At the 1820 General Conference, Bishop McKendree spoke against the use and manufacture of “spirituous liquors,” but a motion to forbid church members from distilling such liquors was tabled indefinitely and thereby defeated. The 1824 General Conference is noteworthy, because it is one of the very few such Methodist gatherings to have had no formal discussions concerning the manufacture, sale, or use of liquor. In *Methodism and the Temperance Reformation*, the Reverend Henry Wheeler points out that by the time of the 1824 General Conference,

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*Centennial Temperance Conference, *One Hundred Years of Temperance*, p. 306.

*ibid.*, p. 307.


*Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 61.
intemperance. As the official newspaper of the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and for several years as the official paper of the entire church, the *Herald* provided a major forum for the expression of temperance sentiments. A review of the *Herald*’s pages between 1823 and 1836 reveals an increasing zeal among New England Methodists to suppress intemperance. More importantly, such a review underscores the leadership of the Reverend Wilbur Fisk and the New England Conference in transforming that zeal into specific policy statements and a substantive temperance reform movement.

**Historical Background**

The New England Methodist temperance movement in the years 1823-1836 cannot be thoroughly understood without an understanding of Methodism’s response to the alcohol question in the preceding century. In England in May 1743, the founders of Methodism, John and Charles Wesley, formulated the general rules of the United Societies of Methodism. Among those rules was the declaration that all Methodist society members were “expected to evidence their desire of salvation, first, by doing no harm; by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced, such as...drunkenness, buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity.” This statement came to be known as “Mr. Wesley’s rule” (that is, John Wesley’s rule) on the subject of temperance.

By 1823, American Methodists had somehow drifted away from obedience to the Wesleys’ rigid regulations in opposition to the consumption, manufacture, and trade of “ardent spirits.” This had certainly not been the intention of early American Methodist leaders, including Bishop Francis Asbury, who affirmed their opposition to liquor at the 1783 General Conference:

> In 1783 the question was introduced into the minutes: “Should our friends be permitted to make spirituous liquors, and sell and drink them in drama? Answer: By no means. We think it wrong in its nature and consequences, and desire all our preachers to teach the people, by precept and example, to put away this evil.”

When the Methodist Episcopal Church was formed at the Christmas Conference of 1784, the preceding statement was reaffirmed, and Wesley’s original rule on the subject was adopted by American Methodists.

In 1789 the qualifying phrase “unless in cases of extreme necessity” was dropped from Wesley’s rule, thereby making the official church policy one of abstinence from all distilled liquors. The increased strictness of the rule existed for only one year, for in 1790 the General Conference eliminated the prohibition upon buying and selling liquor, and dropped the word “extreme” from the remainder of the rule.

By 1790 the social custom of drinking distilled liquor and fermented beverages had become deeply interwoven in the fabric of American life, including the life of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The official Methodist policy was still intended to discourage church members from the consumption of liquor, but the policy could not be successfully enforced. This was true largely for two reasons. First, the manufacture and sale of liquor had become a profitable business, especially in the frontier regions in which Methodism had its greatest strength. Second, as contemporary minister J.B. Finley testified,

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There had been for years great laxity in the administration of the discipline, and the rule against drinking had, in a great degree, become a dead letter. About this time the temperance reformation began to attract attention, and soon afterward temperance societies were formed throughout the land, both in and out of the Church.  

Early New England Methodist Temperance Reform

"As for New England proper, the Methodist leaders were, from the first, opposed to liquor and the immorality that accompanied it, but only slowly did they join with the temperance groups." Only minimal evidence can be found to indicate that before 1823 New England Methodists treated the consumption of intoxicating beverages differently from their fellow Methodists in other regions of the nation. An exception to this pattern may be found in a resolution passed by a quarterly conference held at the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Lynn, Massachusetts on February 17, 1818: "Resolved, That we view with concern the prevalence of vice, particularly intemperance, among our fellowmen, and that we will endeavor to use our influence to suppress, and as much as is in us, to prevent spreading of the evil."  

Some time between the adoption of this resolution and 1826 the members of this conference formed the first specifically Methodist temperance society in this country. In 1826 a meeting of the society was held in the Lynn church and "one hundred and thirty members were added to a society already existing." Along with other regional temperance societies, the group joined in a petition to the Massachusetts legislature to prohibit the sale of "aromatic spirits by hucksters, peddlers, etc., at or near any religious meetings."  

Prior to 1823 New England temperance reform had been undertaken almost exclusively by Congregational and Unitarian clergy and laypersons. Methodist passivity with respect to the temperance cause stemmed in part from a cultural acceptance of liquor consumption and in part from a belief that such consumption was a personal matter to be directed neither by church or state. However, some Methodists genuinely opposed both intemperance and any use of liquor, but failed to join temperance societies because they believed the Methodist Episcopal Church, by reason of its Discipline's stand on the issue, to be a form of temperance society.  

The second issue of Zion's Herald (January, 1823) reflects an apparently common Methodist outlook on the consumption of alcohol. The paper issued a stinging editorial against intemperance, but while the editorial lambasted intoxication, it did not advocate abstinence from all liquor or support the formation of temperance societies. The editorial did express the most prominent contemporary Methodist arguments against intemperance: intemperance ruined homes and families, created a criminal and irresponsible character, debased human beings to animalistic levels, and wasted property resources (drunkards could not be responsible stewards of God-given wealth and property).  

Three years elapsed after the publication of this editorial and the appearance in Zion's Herald of the first major attack on intemperance written by a New England Methodist minister. Pieces opposing intemperance were written for the Herald during this three-year span, but they were anecdotes, poems, and vignettes briefly depicting and implicitly condemning the evils of intemperance. These pieces were not extended, thoroughly-reasoned essays. Most had distinct "morals" attached, including the affirmation that intemperance caused a single-mindedness that led to premature death:  

A WARNING TO LOVERS OF RUM. Drowned in the Charles River, on the night of the 19th inst. Mr. Luther Ellis of Holliston, aged 58. It is doing no injustice to the deceased, to say he was an excessive lover of rum; and it is supposed the fatal accident happened in consequence of his being somewhat intoxicated by this fascinating poison (a bottle of which was found in his pocket). So intent was he on procuring a large supply 'to keep Sunday with,' that he attempted to cross the river. . . . No reason can be assigned for his so doing, but a determination, even at the hazard of his life, to obtain wherewith to pay for a gallon of rum; together with a fear (as he expressed it) that the store would be shut before he should be able to accomplish his design by going around.  

Other "morality stories" linked temperance to material and professional success in life. Others stressed that the most important aim of life was to be useful. Intemperance therefore rendered one's existence meaningless, since the intemperate person could not be useful. Among the most poignant vignettes were those which depicted the ruin and agony brought upon the family of the drunkard and the concomitant loss of

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4Ibid., p. 70.
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Methodist History

There had been for years great laxity in the administration of the discipline, and the rule against drinking had, in a great degree, become a dead letter. About this time the temperance reformation began to attract attention, and soon afterward temperance societies were formed throughout the land, both in and out of the Church.4

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8ZH, Volume I, No. 2 (January 16, 1823), The following is an excerpt from the editorial: "No evil is more dangerous, or attended with more fatal consequences than drunkenness, and yet no evil is extending itself more rapidly through every grade of society. The ignorant and the learned — the child of seven and the man of four score, fall victim before the shrine of Bacchus... . No loss of property, no disappointment, no calamity, can afford the slightest reason for forming a habit so ruinous to soul and body. Three fourths of the blackest crimes, which have stained the annals of our country, have been perpetrated by drunkards. The ruin of thousands of families may be traced to this... . What can be more dishonorable, more degrading, more abusive to the understanding of human nature, than for persons capable of the highest attainments in the arts and sciences, and in the enjoyment of social life to make themselves more loathsome than reptiles, and fiercer and more cruel than the bear robbed of her whelps. Parents and children, husbands and wives, permit us to caution you against intemperance... ."
9ZH, Volume III, No. 9 (March 2, 1825).
respect suffered by the drunkard. 12

Stories were told of drunkards freezing and drunkards burning, of threats to the nation from intemperance, of the prospective eternal damnation of every drunkard’s soul, and even of the intemperate degeneracy of women and children. As time passed the emphasis of the writers progressed from a simple call for temperance to a clamoring for total abstinence from alcoholic beverages. Such clamoring often included the moral judgment that friends and neighbors of the drunkard bore a responsibility for his/her downfall. 13 By 1827 these contributions were being written in both prose and poetry, 14 and were appearing, almost without exception, in every issue of the paper.

1826: Year of Commitment

Anecdotal and poetic moralizing on the evils of intemperance would linger for many years as an integral element of the temperance reformation. However, in 1826 New England Methodism moved beyond those simple exhortations to more intense, more argumentative essays on behalf of temperance reform. A harbinger of this transformation appeared in Zion’s Herald in February, 1826. The Herald’s editorial comments in this issue began by indicating that New England Methodists appeared willing to cooperate with other New England denominations in a crusade against intemperance. But the editorial went beyond that affirmation.

The editorial stressed that intemperance provided a threat to the well-being of the nation and the sanctity of the Christian faith. Intemperance was characterized as the most prominent evil in the nation, an evil to be attacked by all true patriots and Christians. The editorial stated that all human beings were responsible for drunkards’ souls and were therefore called to join the forces of temperance reform. This was a rallying cry for Methodists:

This subject is of most solemn moment, and ought to fill every generous and benevolent heart, until the land is cleansed from this evil, and is become a mountain of holiness. . . . Christians of every name are alike obligated with every lover of his country to awake to the alarming case of tens of thousands of drunken Americans, who are in dreadful slavery, inheriting, multiplying and transmitting chains which bind not only the body in its momentary being, but the immortal soul throughout its endless duration. 15

Responses from New England Methodist readers echoed the Herald’s editorial’s basic tenets: intemperance appeared to be rampaging through the land, and the active efforts of Christian persons, as well as the influence of the pulpit, 16 should be arrayed against this vice. Some readers

[Editorial notes and references are included for context and depth.]

12ZH, Volume III, No. 18 (May 4, 1825). This issue of the Herald contained a very poignant description of the drunkard’s loss of respect in his family: “The Death of a Drunkard. The drunkard, then, must also die! — Yes, poor man, your career of madness will come to an end; your last cup will be emptied; . . . Soon! And who will be your nourishers? Your wife, your bosom friend, will she bend over your cold remains, and wet your clay with her tears? No! her tears have all been shed before. . . . In anguish of soul did she often pray for you. But you treated her with contempt — you have been her ruin. . . . By you she has been abandoned, abused, and disgraced. . . . Your children cannot feel that their father is dead. . . . You have torn the clothes from their shivering limbs, and they are now left to beg or starve. They owe their existence to you, and that existence you have rendered miserable.”

13Idem. The following is an excerpt illustrating an accusation of friends of drunkards as being guilty, in part, of aiding the drunkard’s demise: “Ye friends of virtue and of man; ye too, who believe there is no hereafter, draw near while I remove the curtain and show you this dying man. Once he was the child of tender and pious parents, the burden of their cares, the comfort of their passing days, and the object of a thousand hopes. . . . You saw him when he first began to linger about the tavern, to neglect his business and family. You saw it, but you told him to go on! You saw to what it would lead, but not a word did you whisper in his ear, nor an effort did you make to save him from ruin. Now it is too late; the work of ruin is accomplished, and ’at your hands shall his blood be required!’”

14Idem. An example of temperance poetry from this issue follows:

Stay, mortal, stay; nor heedless thus
Thy sure destruction seal;
Within that cup there lurks a curse,
Which all who drink may feel;
Disease and death, forever nigh,
Stand ready at your door,
And eager wait to hear the cry
Of give me — one glass more.
Stay, mortal, stay — repent, return;
Reflect upon thy fate;
The poisonous draft indignant spurn;
Spurn, spurn it, ere too late.
Oh, fly the alehouse, horrid din,
Nor linger at the door,
Let thou, perchance, should sip again,
The treacherous — one glass more.”

15ZH, Volume IV, No. 5 (February 1, 1826).

16ZH, Volume IV, No. 11 (March 15, 1826). A letter to the editor in this issue called for ministers to preach against intemperance:

“Dear Sir,—It is, I believe, generally acknowledged, that the evil of Intemperance is advancing in the United States with alarming rapidity, and even among ourselves we have reason to tremble for the future virtue of this happy Commonwealth. Drunkenness is yearly increasing our poor rates, filling our jails, almshouses, and houses of correction, hurrying some of our fellow men to eternity by the hands of the public executioner, and multitudes to a premature grave by every form of loathsome and fatal disease. Is it not proper that the monitory voice of the pulpit should be raised to caution the community against impending danger? Would it not be well for the clergyman of all denominations to make this subject of their discourses on the approaching fast day? The interests of virtue surely demand such an effort from those who are her professional guardians, and the more universal the effort, the greater will be the prospect of success.”
respects suffered by the drunkard.\textsuperscript{12}

Stories were told of drunkards freezing and drunkards burning, of threats to the nation from intemperance, of the prospective eternal damnation of every drunkard's soul, and even of the intemperate degeneracy of women and children. As time passed the emphasis of the writers progressed from a simple call for temperance to a clamoring for total abstinence from alcoholic beverages. Such clamoring often included the moral judgment that friends and neighbors of the drunkard bore a responsibility for his/her downfall.\textsuperscript{13} By 1827 these contributions were being written in both prose and poetry,\textsuperscript{14} and were appearing, almost

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{12}ZH, Volume III, No. 18 (May 4, 1825). This issue of the Herald contained a very poignant description of the drunkard's loss of respect in his family: "THE DEATH OF A DRUNKARD. The drunkard, then, must also die! — Yes, poor man, your career of madness will come to an end; your last cup will be emptied; . . . Soon! And who will be your norturers? Your wife, your bosom friend, will shed over your cold remains, and wet your clay with her tears? No! her tears have all been shed before. . . . In anguish of soul did she often pray for you. But you treated her with contempt — you have been her ruin. . . . By you she has been abandoned, abused, and disgraced. . . . Your children cannot feel that their father is dead. . . . You have torn the clothes from their shivering limbs, and they are now left to beg or starve. They owe their existence to you, and that existence you have rendered miserable.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid. The following is an excerpt illustrating an accusation of friends of drunkards as being guilty, in part, of aiding the drunkard's demise: "Ye friends of virtue and of man; ye too, who believe there is no HEREFORTH, draw near while I remove the curtain and show you this dying man. Once he was the child of tender and pious parents, the burden of their cares, the comfort of their passing days, and the object of a thousand hopes . . . You saw him when he first began to linger about the tavern, to neglect his business and family. You saw it, but you told him to go on! You saw to what it would lead, but you would not whisper in his ear, nor an effort did you make to save him from ruin. Now it is too late; the work of ruin is accomplished, and 'at your hands shall his blood be required.'"

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid. An example of temperance poetry from this issue follows:

"Stay mortal, stay; nor heedless thus
Thy sure destruction seal;
Within that cup there lurks a curse,
Which all who drink may feel;
Disease and death, forever nigh,
Stand ready at your door,
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1826: Year of Commitment

Anecdotal and poetic moralizing on the evils of intemperance would linger for many years as an integral element of the temperance reform. However, in 1826 New England Methodism moved beyond those simple exhortations to more intense, more argumentative essays on behalf of temperance reform. A harbinger of this transformation appeared in Zion's Herald in February, 1826. The Herald's editorial comments in this issue began by indicating that New England Methodists appeared willing to cooperate with other New England denominations in a crusade against intemperance. But the editorial went beyond that affirmation.

The editorial stressed that intemperance provided a threat to the well-being of the nation and the sanctity of the Christian faith. Intemperance was characterized as the most prominent evil in the nation, an evil to be attacked by all true patriots and Christians. The editorial stated that all human beings were responsible for drunkards' souls and were therefore called to join the forces of temperance reform. This was a rallying cry for Methodists:

This subject is of most solemn moment, and ought to fill every generous and benevolent heart, until the land is cleansed from this evil, and become a mountain of holiness. . . . Christians of every name are alike obligated with every lover of his country to awake to the alarming case of tens of thousands of drunken Americans, who are in dreadful slavery, inheriting, multiplying and transmitting chains which bind not only the body in its momentary being, but the immortal soul throughout its endless duration.\textsuperscript{15}

Responses from New England Methodist readers echoed the Herald editorial's basic tenets: intemperance appeared to be rampaging through the land, and the active efforts of Christian persons, as well as the influence of the pulpit,\textsuperscript{16} should be arrayed against this vice. Some readers

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wrote that intemperance was the incarnation of Satan. Others feared that, if left unchecked, intemperance would erode the moral fibre of the nation and thereby destroy American culture. More pragmatic temperance advocates pointed out that not only did drunkenness destroy individuals and families, but it caused an increasing number of useless citizens whose care could only be financed by a rapidly escalating tax rate. The cry had begun for concerted action against intemperance.

John F. Adams, the Methodist preacher at Lynn Common, Massachusetts, became the first Methodist minister to write an extended treatise for Zion’s Herald on the subject of intemperance. Published in 1826, Adams’ article was the most impressive and cohesive pro-temperance article to appear in the Herald that year. Adams painstakingly itemized a variety of major objections to intemperance, thereby creating a catalogue of the day’s temperance arguments.

Adams’ most prominent argument was that intemperance “disqualifies for the business and labors of life. . . . His [the drunkard’s] taxes and other debts are not paid. . . . The education of his children is neglected.” Adams also contended that profane language, Sabbath breaking, uncontrollable anger, lewdness and quarrelling were inevitable consequences of intemperance. Similarly, he understood intemperance to bring miserable afflictions upon families: if the breadwinner was home, the family starved and went about poorly-clothed because all income was spent on ardent spirits; if drunkenness sent the breadwinner to the almshouse or to prison, the family had no earnings and the consequences were the same.

Adams further believed the intemperate person to be a corrupter of society, “both by precept and example.” He also stressed that intemperance laid the foundation of premature death by disease while also ruining the individual’s moral and intellectual faculties. Intemperance, wrote Adams, allowed “little, if any hope of reformation. . . . It is, therefore, almost a moral certainty, that the intemperate sinner will continue in his course, and perish without a Savior.”

This chronicle of intemperance-engendered evils was followed in the same article by Adams’ proposals for remedies for intemperance. Adams was the first New England Methodist to make such proposals. Foremost among these was the call for temperate persons to wholly abstain from the use of ardent spirits, except in cases of sickness. This was, of course, the official position of the Methodist Episcopal Church with respect to liquor consumption. But it was a position that the church had not diligently stressed to its members, and a position that its members by no means universally endorsed.

Adams’ advocacy of such near-total abstinence was based on an increasingly popular notion that regular use of liquor led necessarily to intemperance. “No man ever intended to become a drunkard, in the outset. Yet it is almost a certainty, that he will be an intemperate man, who uses a little regularly. The appetite increases with indulgence, and the power to withstand it diminishes.”

Adams also called for an end to drinking liquor at social gatherings and cautioned employers not to employ anyone who drank any liquor whatsoever. And finally, Adams condemned the popular belief that the temperate use of ardent spirits by those engaged in heavy labor would increase those individuals’ capacity to work, stating that this practice contributed only to intemperance and not to increased productivity.

Following the lead of zealots such as Adams, the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church steadfastly committed itself to the temperance movement in June 1826 with a dramatic and unprecedented action: convicting one of its own ministers of the charge of selling liquor. No New England Methodist minister had previously been so convicted. The statement in the Conference minutes is terse and unyielding:

James P. Harvey, who had been suspended by a council of ministers during the year, was tried on the charge of “retailing ardent spirits contrary to the rules and discipline of our Church.” He confessed the deed. The presiding elder was directed to demand his credentials.”

New England Methodist involvement in temperance reform was further prompted in 1826 by the founding, in Boston, on February 13, of The American Society for the Promotion of Temperance. The founders of this society were not Methodists. They were Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Unitarians, of both clerical and lay backgrounds. Like the Reverend Adams, Society members were all total abstainers, and they advocated abstinence from all liquor as a primary means of overcoming intemperance. Although Zion’s Herald did not even acknowledge the existence of this society until January, 1827, the society’s temperance platform was evidently attracting the attention and support of New England Methodists:

The American Society relied heavily . . . on support from religious bodies as such.

16Idem.
17George Whitaker, Minutes of the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, p. 51.
18Total abstinence” at this point in time still allowed “ardent spirits” to be used for medicinal purposes in cases of illness. This stance is somewhat ironic in light of the prevailing common contention that alcohol abuse promoted illnesses and bodily infirmities.
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Methodism as a whole did not respond readily. A list of thirty-four such bodies in the society’s second Annual Report (1828) shows only one Methodist body — the New England Conference. . . . Timothy Merritt and Wilbur Fisk led the movement in New England.

The Burgeoning of New England Methodist Temperance Reform — 1827

In 1827 the New England Conference, building upon a groundswell of ministerial enthusiasm for temperance reform, became the strongest temperance-supporting body in the Methodist Episcopal Church. It was in this year that the conference officially affirmed its commitment to temperance reform, when on the motion of Timothy Merritt and John Lindsay it "resolved that we witness with great satisfaction the exertions that are being made to suppress the use of ardent spirits: and that it be peculiarly the duty of the conference at this time to enforce in their administration, as well as by example, the rules of our Discipline respecting the use of spirituous liquors."23

The pages of Zion’s Herald reflect this burgeoning enthusiasm for temperance reform: the number of articles appearing therein in 1827 in support of temperance causes more than doubled those of a similar nature that had appeared in 1826.24 George Storrs, LaRoy Sunderland, Orange Scott, and Wilbur Fisk were the four most prominent Methodist ministers to use the Herald in 1827 as a platform for voicing temperance reform sentiments. All four diligently supported that cause, but only Fisk would have temperance addresses published in the Herald in any other year. Abolition of slavery came to be the social reform for which Storrs, Sunderland, and Scott battled most zealously, and these three were to come into conflict with the colonizationist Fisk in the following decade. But in 1827 all four men wrote cogent, impassioned pieces that strengthened temperance reform fervor in New England Methodism.

Storrs’ speech (delivered to the Sandwich, New Hampshire Franklin Society before being printed in the Herald) appeared in May. It carefully delineated a host of ill effects linked with intemperance. In this regard, Storrs broke no new ground: all of his “evils” had been specified by John F. Adams. Storrs did, however, dramatically confront Herald readers with a description of a polarization of forces in the war against intemperance. To be a temperance advocate, he wrote, was to be on the side of God and country; to refuse to battle intemperance was to commit oneself to the legions of Satan.

Storrs’ recommendations for action against intemperance stressed

the Methodist theological belief that human beings exercise God-given free will. In union with God, wrote Storrs, Christian persons had the capability to drive Satan, in his guise of intemperance, from the land:

If you would save your country, your families and especially your own souls, you must expect Satan will be enraged; nor will he quietly give up the stronghold of intemperance; he is too sensible of the utility of this fortress, to his kingdom, to yield it without great exertion. Let us, therefore, in the name of God, lift up our banner, and take it by storm, and pursue the deadly foe till we shall leave him not so much as a place for the sole of his foot in all our happy country.25

LaRoy Sunderland penned three extended attacks upon intemperance for Zion’s Herald in 1827. Among the unique emphases of Sunderland’s invectives was a contention that, whereas intemperance was known to be sinful, “professors of religion” could not legitimately battle intemperance if they themselves were partakers of liquor. Idealistcally, Sunderland believed that Christians who drank liquor were hypocrites.

Out of a practical concern for reform, Sunderland also stressed that drunkards would not be inclined toward self-reformation so long as they could see nominal Christians making regular use of ardent spirits. Hence Sunderland called for all Christians to abstain from drinking liquor, both to save their own souls and to set an example for fellow citizens:

In vain do we exhort the abandoned father, the profligate son, to turn from the intoxicating bowl, while our strongest arguments are met and answered in language like the following — “There is Mr. — —, he is a professor of religion, and he drinks as often, though, perhaps, not so much as I do — it is true, he don’t get drunk, but yet he drinks, and he drinks when he has a mind to — and so do I.” . . . It matters little if a man drink more or less; if he drinks at all, he cannot successfully reprove others who do the same.26

Sunderland came closer than any other New England Methodist temperance reformer of the 1820s to advocating entire abstinence from liquor. He begrudgingly allowed that it was permissible to use ardent spirits in times of illness, but only when prescribed by a physician. Sunderland was also among the first group of New England Methodists to cite the manufacturers and retailers of ardent spirits as being enemies of the temperance cause and of American society. In his estimation, manufacturers and retailers were “helping the devil with his infernal work, in the destruction of the souls and bodies of our fellow men. . . . The man who furnishes his neighbor with ardent spirits, exposes himself to the curse of God.”27

Sunderland called for the nation’s state legislatures to prohibit the manufacture and sale of liquor. He also made it quite clear that his denomination, at least in New England, would have nothing to do with

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either manufacturers or sellers of "the poison":

I think the denomination of Christians to which I belong, will justify me in saying, that we are not anxious to have people belong with us who are dealers in ardent spirits; and that if we have one such person we should think ourselves "unfortunate," if we could neither persuade him to cease from this practice or leave our society. . . . I wonder that more has not been said on the practice of those who "give their neighbor drink," than has yet been said in Zion's Herald. . . . 28

It was also in 1827 that an article in Zion's Herald by Eleazer Stevens, the Methodist preacher at Lebanon, New Hampshire, occasioned the entrance of the young Reverend Orange Scott into the public battle against intemperance. Stevens had written that intemperance was morally wrong (between 1823 and 1836 no New England Methodist minister publicly contradicted that position) and that the drinking of intoxicating liquor was "unnatural." But Stevens contended that poverty and personal unhappiness were more the causes of intemperance than its consequences. Thus, wrote the New Hampshire preacher, the church should attempt to eradicate intemperance by eliminating its causes: human poverty, unhappiness, and despair.

Stevens advocated using the Bible to show people the folly of drunkenness. He opposed the tactic of chastising and frightening inebriate persons. Furthermore, he stated that the temperate use of "spirits was not necessarily immoral." Quoting I Timothy 4:4, Stevens emphasized that all of God's creations were good if only accepted with thanksgiving and used properly. 29

Many New England Methodists interpreted Stevens' article as an attempt to take the "fire" out of their temperance reform efforts or as an opposition to the entire temperance movement. Scott was one such person, and he argued against Stevens in Zion's Herald on a point-by-point basis, quoting extensively from the Bible in asserting the necessity of an ongoing, uncompromising zeal in the temperance reform movement.

I do not know, sir, how much it would take to amount to an express prohibition in your view of the subject; but all classes of people, good and bad, have always supposed the Bible to be against drunkenness; and without going further, what the prophet Isaiah says upon the subject amounts, in my mind, to express prohibition. (Isaiah 5:11, 22, and 28:1 and 3). 30

Scott went on to cite Matthew 24:49 and Luke 21:34 as prohibitions issued by Jesus against intemperance. Refuting Stevens, he stated that empirical evidence revealed that poverty and degradation were more often caused by intemperance than vice versa. And he went on to quote "the celebrated Dr. Rush" as having unequivocally indicated that intemperance is extremely hazardous to one's health. Scott was meeting a challenge to temperance reform that had sprung from within New England Methodism. In so doing he regenerated the temperance movement and became the first New England Methodist to wage public battle against intemperance using extensive quotations from the Bible.

The Rise of Wilbur Fisk As New England Methodism's Temperance Reform Leader

The letter written by the Reverend Wilbur Fisk to Zion's Herald in 1827 was not as significant as the contributions of Storrs, Sunderland, and Scott. Fisk's letter related temperance reform activities undertaken by the people of Wilbraham, Massachusetts, where Fisk was then Principal of Wesleyan Academy. Under Fisk's direction, the students of the Academy had formed their own temperance society (the first of its kind in the country) and the people of Wilbraham had become deeply influenced in favor of temperance reform:

Several gentlemen of influence. . . have renounced the use of spirits altogether, and the bottle has been banished from a number of families. The importance of the subject is much thought of by those who before thought little of it; and possibly, an impression has been made on some minds, which will not be readily effaced. 31

Fisk's reform efforts in Wilbraham were not unproductive or unimportant, but it was his steadfastness on behalf of temperance reform in years following 1827 that would make him the most important New England Methodist temperance reformer of his time.

Fisk departed for the Methodist Episcopal Church General Conference of 1828 as the unquestioned leader of the New England Conference delegation. He had secured more votes from his peers than any other delegate and had been a near unanimous choice (earning 70 of 72 votes) to represent his fellow ministers at General Conference. The New England Conference had unequivocally condemned intemperance, ranking it among the world's most contemptible evils. Fisk shared these views with his fellow conference members and strongly endorsed their increasingly fervent temperance reform efforts. 32

Knowing and sharing his conference's views on temperance, Fisk undoubtedly felt obligated to confront the General Conference with the temperance question. That body met in Pittsburgh for twenty days without even mentioning temperance reform. But on the twenty-first and

\[^{28}ZH\, Volume V, No. 26 (June 27, 1827).\]
\[^{29}ZH\, Volume V, No. 44 (October 31, 1827).\]
\[^{30}ZH\, Volume V, No. 50 (December 12, 1827).\]
either manufacturers or sellers of "the poison":

I think the denomination of Christians to which I belong, will justify me in saying, that we are not anxious to have people belong with us who are dealers in ardent spirits; and that if we have one such person we should think ourselves "unfortunate," if we could neither persuade him to cease from this practice or leave our society...I wonder that more has not been said on the practice of those who "give their neighbor drink," than has yet been said in Zion's Herald. . . .

It was also in 1827 that an article in Zion's Herald by Eleazer Stevens, the Methodist preacher at Lebanon, New Hampshire, occasioned the entrance of the young Reverend Orange Scott into the public battle against intemperance. Stevens had written that intemperance was morally wrong (between 1823 and 1836 no New England Methodist minister publicly contradicted that position) and that the drinking of intoxicating liquor was "unnatural." But Stevens contended that poverty and personal unhappiness were more the causes of intemperance than its consequences. Thus, wrote the New Hampshire preacher, the church should attempt to eradicate intemperance by eliminating its causes: human poverty, unhappiness, and despair.

Stevens advocated using the Bible to show people the folly of drunkenness. He opposed the tactic of chastising and frightening inebriate persons. Furthermore, he stated that the temperate use of "spirits was not necessarily immoral." Quoting I Timothy 4:4, Stevens emphasized that all of God's creations were good if only accepted with thanksgiving and used properly.

Many New England Methodists interpreted Stevens' article as an attempt to take the "fire" out of their temperance reform efforts or as an opposition to the entire temperance movement. Scott was one such person, and he argued against Stevens in Zion's Herald on a point-by-point basis, quoting extensively from the Bible in asserting the necessity of an ongoing, uncompromising zeal in the temperance reform movement.

I do not know, sir, how much it would take to amount to an express prohibition in your view of the subject; but all classes of people, good and bad, have always supposed the Bible to be against drunkenness; and without going further, what the prophet Isaiah says upon the subject amounts, in my mind, to express prohibition. (Isaiah 5:11, 22, and 26:1 and 3).

Scott went on to cite Matthew 24:49 and Luke 21:34 as prohibitions issued by Jesus against intemperance. Refuting Stevens, he stated that empirical evidence revealed that poverty and degradation were more often caused by intemperance than vice versa. And he went on to quote

"the celebrated Dr. Rush" as having unequivocally indicated that intemperance is extremely hazardous to one's health. Scott was meeting a challenge to temperance reform that had sprung from within New England Methodism. In so doing he regenerated the temperance movement and became the first New England Methodist to wage public battle against intemperance using extensive quotations from the Bible.

The Rise of Wilbur Fisk As New England Methodism's Temperance Reform Leader

The letter written by the Reverend Wilbur Fisk to Zion's Herald in 1827 was not as significant as the contributions of Storrs, Sunderland, and Scott. Fisk's letter related temperance reform activities undertaken by the people of Wilbraham, Massachusetts, where Fisk was then Principal of Wesleyan Academy. Under Fisk's direction, the students of the Academy had formed their own temperance society (the first of its kind in the country) and the people of Wilbraham had become deeply influenced in favor of temperance reform:

Several gentlemen of influence. . . have renounced the use of spirits altogether, and the bottle has been banished from a number of families. The importance of the subject is much thought of by those who before thought little of it; and possibly, an impression has been made on some minds, which will not be readily effaced.

Fisk's reform efforts in Wilbraham were not unproductive or unimportant, but it was his steadfastness on behalf of temperance reform in years following 1827 that would make him the most important New England Methodist temperance reformer of his time.

Fisk departed for the Methodist Episcopal Church General Conference of 1828 as the unquestioned leader of the New England Conference delegation. He had secured more votes from his peers than any other delegate and had been a near unanimous choice (earning 70 of 72 votes) to represent his fellow ministers at General Conference. The New England Conference had unequivocally condemned intemperance, ranking it among the world's most contemptible evils. Fisk shared these views with his fellow conference members and strongly endorsed their increasingly fervent temperance reform efforts.

Knowing and sharing his conference's views on temperance, Fisk undoubtedly felt obligated to confront the General Conference with the temperance question. That body met in Pittsburgh for twenty days without even mentioning temperance reform. But on the twenty-first and

\(^{31}\) ZH, Volume V, No. 20 (May 16, 1827).

\(^{32}\) Letters on temperance from New England Methodist ministers that appeared in Zion's Herald in 1834 continued to condemn intemperance, equated it with idolatry and began to call for abstinence from all intoxicating intemperance, including wine and malt beverages. See ZH, Volume VI, Nos. 6, 10, 16.
final day Fisk addressed the issue, and in so doing established New England Conference leadership in Methodist temperance reform efforts of the ensuing decade.

Perhaps sensing that anti-intemperance sentiments of other conferences were not so fervent or "progressive" as those in New England, Fisk wrote and presented a motion that was more moderate in tone than were the views of the members of the New England Conference. Fisk's resolution called attention not only to the long-standing Methodist opposition to intemperance, but also to the immediate need for active support of temperance reform efforts.

Whereas, the rules and examples of the Wesleyan Methodists from the commencement of their existence as a people, both in Europe and America, were calculated to suppress intemperance, and to discountenance the needless use of ardent spirits; and whereas the public mind in our country, for a few years past, has been remarkably awakened to a sense of the importance of this subject, therefore,

Resolved, 1. That we rejoice in all the laudable and proper efforts now making to promote this just object, so important to the interest both of the Church and the nation.

Resolved, 2. That all of our preachers and people be expected, and they are hereby expected to adhere to their first principles as contained in their excellent rules on this subject, and as practised by our fathers, and to do all they prudently can, both by precept and example, to suppress intemperance throughout the land.

Resolved, 3. That to bring about the reformation desired on this subject, it is important that we neither drink ourselves (except medicinally), nor give it to visitors or workmen.

Acceptance of the resolution by the General Conference signified two important consequences: in the first place, the official governing body of the Methodist Episcopal Church now sanctioned the individual efforts then being made by its preachers on behalf of temperance reform; and secondly, implicit approval was now granted to Church members and bodies who wished to lend their support to organizations such as the American Temperance Society. This latter consequence was extremely important for the New England Conference, for in spite of the opposition of Methodists in other regions, it had already officially resolved to support the American Temperance Society. The New England Conference could now continue that policy with the tacit blessing of the General Conference.

Resistance: Nathan Bangs and the Christian Advocate and Journal

New England Methodist temperance reform endeavors received a minor setback in August 1828, when a decision was made by the Methodist Episcopal Church to transfer the publication of Zion's Herald to New York and to merge the paper with the Christian Advocate and Journal. The church intended to eliminate all regional Methodist newspapers and to substitute a single weekly paper to be circulated among all Methodist conferences. Nathan Bangs was named to edit the new Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion's Herald, the first issue of which appeared on September 4, 1828. New England Methodist temperance reformers no longer had the opportunity to inundate a regional paper with pro-temperance articles and speeches. Although Zion's Herald had not been a temperance newspaper, it had provided a forum for inspirational pieces on behalf of the temperance cause.

A further hindrance to the growth of New England Methodist temperance reform was the negative view of temperance societies taken by Nathan Bangs and others on the new paper's editorial staff. Bangs was among the most prominent members of American Methodism at the time, and his opinions on all church matters, practical and doctrinal, were accorded exceptional respect. Bangs was sincerely opposed to intemperance. But when he first became editor of the Advocate and Journal, he was also distinctly opposed to the formation of temperance societies, especially those of an interdenominational nature. Although no explicit reference was made concerning this position until June, 1829, the paucity of temperance-related material in the paper must have been noted by temperance reform supporters.

Bangs opposed the formation of temperance societies and the joining of temperance societies by Methodists because of his fundamental conviction that the Methodist Church had always labored to suppress intemperance. Therefore, there was no need for any Methodist to become involved in a temperance society. By remaining active in the church, every person was intrinsically involved in himself or herself in the struggle against intemperance.

More importantly, stressed Bangs, Methodists should be concerned to subdue intemperance in all its forms, not simply in its form of liquor abuse. And he believed that all forms of intemperance could only be overcome by a conversion of the sinner, by a changing of the sinner's heart:

It is our full conviction that nothing short of a radical change can effect a permanent reformation from any vicious practice whatsoever. An unconverted sinner may be persuaded, from a variety of motives, to refrain from any habit of vice to which he has been addicted: but unless his heart be changed, his disposition renewed by the energies of the Holy Christ, he will only substitute one vice for another."
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25Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald (hereafter abbreviated CAJZH), Volume III, No. 40 (June 5, 1829) and Volume III, No. 50 (August 15, 1829).
Two other factors figured significantly in Bangs' opposition to Methodist involvement in temperance societies outside of the church. The first of these was his adamant disapproval of the American Temperance Society's plan to raise funds for the support of an agent, who would speak throughout the nation on behalf of temperance reform. Bangs believed that Methodist resources could be more profitably used in the support of Methodist preachers, who could get to the "real root" of the intemperance problem. He also thought that Methodists' funds could be more appropriately employed in the support of superannuated ("worn out") preachers who had dedicated their lives to preaching the gospel.

Additionally, Bangs had been involved for many years in torrid theological disputes with Calvinists, and at the time was involved in the exchange of editorial barbs with editors of religious newspapers of other denominations. Bangs was a staunch Methodist, and he found no worthy reasons for his denominational brethren to join temperance societies that were largely controlled by Calvinists.\textsuperscript{35}

**Persistence: Rebuttals by Merritt and Fisk**

In spite of this turn of events, New England Methodists continued to chart a course of temperance reform. In 1828 quarterly conferences in Sharon, Massachusetts and Litchfield, Connecticut adopted strong resolutions against the consumption of "spirituous liquors" (except in "cases of necessity") by any Methodists within their bounds. In Salisbury, Connecticut, Methodists became vigorous members of the Rigs Society for the Suppression of Intemperance, a society that not only attempted to reform drunkards, but also to dissuade local merchants from trading in intoxicating beverages.

In December 1828, Timothy Merritt, then pastor of the Springfield, Massachusetts circuit, wrote to the *Advocate and Journal* in an attempt to persuade its editors to print more material related to temperance reform. After implicitly chastising the editors for their recalcitrance, Merritt went on to write about the Temperance Society of Springfield, which had been founded in 1827. He reported that the Society was thriving and had recently been inspired by the "total abstinence" doctrine preached by Wilbur Fisk. Merritt also wrote that Fisk, "though he has other business...enough to employ his whole time," had consented to become an agent for the society, "to visit all the towns in the county of Hampden, to promote societies where they do not exist, and to strengthen them where they do."\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35}CAJZH, Volume III, No. 50 (August 15, 1829) and Volume IV, No. 3 (September 18, 1829).

\textsuperscript{36}CAJZH, Volume III, No. 22 (January 30, 1829).

In Merritt's letter to the *Advocate and Journal* are found the earliest indications of the position that Fisk would ultimately adopt with respect to the temperance question: that is, the only successful way to combat intemperance is to abstain at all times from all intoxicating beverages, including wine, malt beverages, and all other fermented drinks. New England Methodists would eventually follow Fisk's lead and adopt this position in 1836.

Merritt's letter is also the earliest record of any Methodist minister becoming an agent for a temperance society. This is another indication of Fisk's commitment to, and leadership in New England, and New England Methodist temperance reform.

It was Fisk who penned the most detailed rebuttal to Bangs' editorial position on the temperance issue. Fisk began the rebuttal by reporting to Bangs that at a camp meeting in Somers, Connecticut he and other preachers had gathered to consider the subject of temperance. They emerged from that session with a set of resolutions that were primarily dedicated to the defense of temperance societies:

Resolved 1. That we have for years passed witnessed with fearfulness and pain the increased use of ardent spirits, and the increased prevalence of drunkenness in our country.

Resolved 2. That we view with great pleasure, as opening unexpectedly a bright prospect to our country and to the church, the late special and successful efforts which have been made, through the means of temperance societies and otherwise, to check the spread of this evil.

Resolved 3. That, as we consider temperance societies and the exertions and influences connected with them, to have been more successful than any other human means in promoting the desired object, therefore we advise all our people to join these societies, and make common cause with all the benevolent, of every name, in this good work.\textsuperscript{37}

These societies, stressed Fisk, were nondenominational in composition, and certainly not in any way opposed to Methodism. Fisk referred to temperance societies as a positive combination of all the sober persons of a community, from all religious denominations, against intemperance. Temperance societies were not, as Bangs feared, "a party cause." Fisk added that he would be "unwilling to allow that any one sect has all the praise in this work."\textsuperscript{38}

In response to Bangs' criticism of the American Temperance Society, Fisk pointed out that while it was indeed true that the Society was seeking to appoint and fund an agent, the Society made no pecuniary demands upon any prospective members. Fisk did oppose raising funds to support a national agent, but he otherwise supported the work of the Society.

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societies was his unequivocal belief that “God, in his providence” had “eminently owned and blessed their means to check intemperance.” As evidence of this divine approval, Fisk cited the 1829 annual report of the American Temperance Society, which stated that “the consumption of ardent spirits has diminished one-half in New England, and one-third throughout the remainder of the land, in the last two years.” Added Fisk:

We are astonished at the effect. The whole community seems aroused, and the weight of moral power brought to bear on this point is immense. . . . We have no doubt that God is in this work; and God's way is the best way, and we wish to walk therein.30

Finally, Fisk encouraged all Methodists to aid in God’s work by joining temperance societies, especially since the societies would aid Methodists in the execution of the principles of their own Discipline. Public sentiment, believed Fisk, had rendered the Methodist rule concerning liquor nearly a dead letter. As a consequence many Methodists drank, sold, and manufactured ardent spirits with impunity. Methodists should therefore join temperance societies, not only to strengthen the common cause and change public sentiment, but to eliminate intemperance in their own Church.

It is difficult to assess the impact of Fisk’s letter upon Nathan Bangs. Some Methodist historians credit Fisk alone for altering Bangs’ position on temperance reform. That is difficult to substantiate. Between October 1829 and April 1831, Bangs made no new editorial comment concerning temperance societies. In the April 1831 issue, however, Bangs indicated that he had come to support temperance societies: “We rejoice in the progress of temperance reformation, in whatever way effected, and highly approve of the formation of temperance societies. . . .”31 It does not seem inappropriate to award Fisk some credit for influencing this change of opinion by a highly influential Methodist opinion-maker.

Affirmation of Fisk’s Leadership in Temperance Reform

During the interim between Fisk’s letter concerning temperance societies and the first perceptible change in Bangs’ position, the New England Conference reaffirmed Fisk’s leadership position in the movement against intemperance. The 1830 minutes of the conference session read: “Brother Fisk was empowered . . . to prepare an address to our people on the subject of Temperance.”32

It would take Fisk nearly eighteen months to prepare his message, since in that year he had been named as the first President of Wesleyan University. His time had become heavily occupied with preparations to open the university in September 1831. He did continue to contribute pro-

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30Idem.
31CAI/ZH, Volume V, No. 31 (April 1, 1831).

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temperance articles to the Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald.33 And in 1831 the New England Conference awarded him 67 out of 71 possible votes and elected him to lead their delegation to the 1832 General Conference.

Fisk’s long-awaited “Address to the Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, on the Subject of Temperance” appeared in two consecutive issues of the Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald in February, 1832. His fundamental concern therein was that after nearly five years of vigorous temperance reform efforts, he had not witnessed the banishment of intemperance or of traffic in ardent spirits from among the ranks of American Methodism. Fisk prefaced his arguments with impassioned words:

I am pleading the cause of God and the cause of humanity. I feel the subject like fire in my bones and like a flame in my heart, and I am constrained to speak: I must unburden my soul; I must at least clear my own skirts of the blood of those who perish. I say, then, on all the moderate drinkers in our land, on all that traffic in the accused thing, rests the woe that God himself hath denounced on him that pilleth the cup to his neighbor’s lips and maketh him drunken. . . . God in his providence has shown us what good men have long desired and prayed for — the certain way of removing forever from our land intemperance and its woes — entire abstinence.34

The address reaffirmed and rephrased sentiments that Fisk had expressed in other contexts: his belief that allowing temperate drinking to continue would insure the continuance of intemperance; his advocacy of entire abstinence from all alcoholic beverages at all times (with the concomitant affirmation that consumption of alcohol could not help persons in times of sickness, and was never good for the human body); his warning to Methodists that those who were not wholly for temperance were against it; his argument that Wesley’s original rule should be restored at General Conference; his emphasis upon the value of temperance societies and interdenominational cooperation as sound weapons against intemperance; and finally, his unequivocal contention that temperance reform was entirely consistent with God’s purposes and with the preaching of the gospel.

Two intriguing features of Fisk’s temperance address were his extensive use of “statistics” to back his arguments, and his implicit advocacy of legislation that would banish intoxicating beverages from the nation. In other contexts Fisk had occasionally mentioned miscellaneous data supportive of the work of temperance societies, but in this address heavy emphasis was laid upon facts and figures:

33See especially CAI/ZH, Volume V, No. 48 (July 29, 1831), in which Fisk speaks of the “enlightened age” that he lived in, enlightened because many individuals had accepted the theory that intoxicating beverages were evil.
34CAI/ZH, Volume VI, No. 23 (February 3, 1832).
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I am pleading the cause of God and the cause of humanity. I feel the subject like fire in my bones and like a flame in my heart, and I am constrained to speak: I must unburden my soul; I must at least clear my own skirts of the blood of those who perish. I say, then, on all the moderate drinkers in our land, on all that traffic in the accursed thing, rests the woe that God himself hath denounced on him that pulleth the cup to his neighbor’s lips and maketh him drunken. . . . God in his providence has shown us what good men have long desired and prayed for — the certain way of removing forever from our land intemperance and its woes — entire abstinence.

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Two intriguing features of Fisk’s temperance address were his extensive use of “statistics” to back his arguments, and his implicit advocacy of legislation that would banish intoxicating beverages from the nation. In other contexts Fisk had occasionally mentioned miscellaneous data supportive of the work of temperance societies, but in this address heavy emphasis was laid upon facts and figures:

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**Idem.**

**CAIZH, Volume V, No. 31 (April 1, 1831).**

**George Whitaker, Minutes of the New England Conference, p. 105.**

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See especially CAIZH, Volume V, No. 48 (July 29, 1831), in which Fisk speaks of the "enlightened age" that he lived in, enlightened because many individuals had accepted the theory that intoxicating beverages were evil.

**CAIZH, Volume VI, No. 23 (February 3, 1832).**
You need not now be told that ardent spirits cost this nation, directly and indirectly, the enormous sum of ninety-four millions of dollars annually; that it is the cause of three-fourths of the crimes and three-fourths of the pauperism in the nation; that there are in the United States more than three hundred thousand drunkards; that of those above thirty thousand annually fall into the drunkard's grave and into the drunkard's hell! You need not now be told that drunkenness brings with it more misery and wretchedness to the inebriate himself, and to those around him, than any other vice, for you have all been eyewitnesses of this wretchedness. The heart sickens at the picture, and we turn away to weep."

Fisk had never before advocated legislation that would prohibit buying, selling, manufacturing, or consuming intoxicating drink. The following excerpt from the address implies that he had come to favor such legislation:

"The great object is, to get public opinion so corrected on this subject, that it will not only be deplorable to deal in this article of merchandise, but that it may be made a contraband of trade, and that it be considered, as it really is, high treason against the interest of the nation, and an offence against the peace of society, to be engaged in this traffic."

Perhaps the most important element of Fisk's temperance address was its compilation of the strongest temperance arguments into one well-structured position paper. But the timing of its publication was also significant: it appeared in print just three months before the commencement of the 1832 General Conference. Fisk had in several places alluded to a personal concern that enthusiasm for temperance reform was subsiding. He may have intended to use the address to rekindle the movement's fervor. Fisk was known throughout the Methodist connection as an individual of outstanding intellectual capabilities and courageous moral leadership. No person would have been better suited to inspire the General Conference to take a decisive stand against intemperance.

**General Conference, 1832**

Although one must be cautious not to overemphasize Fisk's role in inspiring the temperance activities of the 1832 General Conference, one must nevertheless grant him some credit for maintaining the momentum of Methodist temperance reform efforts. For the first time in its history, the General Conference appointed a Temperance Committee (the New England member of which was Shipley W. Wilson). The committee was instructed to "take into consideration the section of our Discipline respecting the retailing of ardent spirits." To it were referred "memorials, petitions, and all matters respecting the manufacture and use of ardent spirits." The committee was further charged to report to the Con-

"Idem.

"CAJZH, Volume VI, No. 24 (February 10, 1832).


ference.

The committee received hundreds of memorials and petitions supporting temperance reform. The pieces came from annual and quarterly conferences, temperance societies, individual churches, and groups of college students. A report was delivered to the General Conference, and on the motion of Fisk, the committee was in turn instructed to prepare a message to be delivered to all the people of the church. Henry B. Bascom of the Kentucky Conference wrote the message, and it received hearty unanimous endorsement from the delegates. None of the positions expressed were different from those contained in Fisk's address, but Bascom's message carried the explicit endorsement of the General Conference.

New England Methodists hailed Bascom's address, but were disturbed when they learned that the General Conference had not reinstated Wesley's rule on the use of intoxicating drink. The editors of the Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion's Herald explained that the rule could not have been legally restored by the 1832 session because that body could not alter the general rules of the American Methodist society without "the concurrence of three-fourths of the members of all the annual conferences present voting for the alteration.""14"

This meant that the question of formal ratification of the restoration of Wesley's rule had to be raised in each annual Conference. In 1832 the New England, New Hampshire, and Maine Conferences voted that Wesley's rule be restored at the next General Conference (1836). In the New England Conference the vote was seventy-seven to zero.

**New Emphases in New England**

Temperance reform remained a vital concern among New England Methodists, despite their burgeoning interest in anti-slavery movements. In 1833 the New England Conference became the first Methodist Episcopal Annual Conference to form its own temperance society. The Reverend Asa Kent was the society's first president, and Wilbur Fisk authored the first constitution. As one would expect, Fisk's principle of "'entire abstinence' served as the foundation for the society.

New England Methodist temperance supporters were also beginning to be called to lecture before other temperance societies, and Fisk's talents were especially in great demand. A May 1833 speech before the New York Temperance Society and a June 1833 speech in the Methodist chapel on Bromfield Street in Boston were two of Fisk's temperance addresses that received wide publication. In those addresses Fisk continued his solid support of the position of "'entire abstinence,'" but he..."
You need not now be told that ardent spirits cost this nation, directly and indirectly, the enormous sum of ninety-four millions of dollars annually; that it is the cause of three-fourths of the crimes and three-fourths of the pauperism in the nation; that there are in the United States more than three hundred thousand drunkards; that of those above thirty thousand annually fall into the drunkard’s grave and into the drunkard’s hell! You need not now be told that drunkenness brings with it more misery and wretchedness to the inebriate himself, and to those around him, than any other vice, for you have all been eyewitnesses of this wretchedness. . . . The heart sickens at the picture, and we turn away to weep. 44

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44CAJZI, Volume VI, No. 24 (February 10, 1832).
46CAJZI, Volume VI, No. 52 (August 24, 1832).
47CAJZI, Volume VII, No. 4 (June 7, 1833) and Volume VII, No. 5 (June 14, 1833).
began to intensify his attacks upon the manufacturers and retailers of intoxicating beverages.

In the first half of the century's fourth decade, three new emphases became intertwined with the New England Methodist temperance movement: first, the belief that revivals of religion were intimately connected to the formation of temperance societies in a particular region; second, the increased resistance to all intoxicants, including wine, beer and cider (a resistance which involved the elimination of wine from communion services); and, third, the alliance of temperance reform sentiments with anti-Catholic agitation.

Temperance reform had often been seen as an instrument of divine providence. Before January 1832, however, no explicit claim had been made in the Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion's Herald that the formation of a temperance society would lead to a revival of religion in a particular area. In that month a letter from a group of Methodists in Bangor, Maine was published. The letter stated that on December 4, 1831, more than eighty persons had joined the newly-created Bangor Methodist Temperance Society. The letter went on:

To encourage our preachers and people in the formation of temperance societies, I might add, that since the formation of our temperance society, God has poured out his Spirit upon us; the Church has been much quickened, and not less than nine or ten souls the past week have been convicted. Our temperance movements we regard as one means of our increasing religious prosperity.15

The interrelatedness of temperance reform and revivals of religion became increasingly emphasized in New England Methodism. This position was stressed in Zion's Herald in an 1834 letter from "V. — A Junior Preacher:"

And, Mr. Editor, in my opinion, this state of things (the failure of some local churches to support temperance reform), is, in a vast many cases, the greatest reason why revivals of religion are not witnessed. Indeed, how can we expect a revival of religion out of the church, till there is one in it? And how can we expect to see religion flourish in the church, so long as we, in a measure, harbor an evil among us which is so contrary to the spirit of Christianity, so subversive of the spirit of holy devotion, as habitual use of, and traffic in ardent drinks?20

By the establishment of the New England Conference Temperance Society in 1833, the official temperance position of New England Methodism stated that members of the church should abstain from all intoxicating beverages, including the widely-used fermented drinks — beer, wine, and cider. There is some evidence that this position was difficult for all New England Methodists to accept. There was some attrition from regional temperance societies,21 but the "entire abstinence" rule came to be increasingly accepted by those societies.

This new emphasis presented a problem for ministers in the administration of communion, because wine could no longer be used in the sacrament and had to be replaced by unfermented grape juice. The editor of Zion's Herald explicitly delineated the paper's position on the issue:

To use poison, as alcohol in all its forms is now acknowledged to be, for the sign of our Savior’s precious blood, to us appears most absurd, and at pointed variance with this holy institution. We hope the time has now arrived when those who “bear the vessel of the Lord” will see that they are kept clean from the bane of souls; and that the cup of the Lord is not unwittingly made the chalice of death!22

When Zion's Herald resumed publication in Boston in September 1833, it became a staunch defender of the “entire abstinence” position. Such editorial stances brought the paper into dramatic conflict with the Roman Catholic newspaper, The Roman Catholic Sentinel. At this juncture in their history, many New England Methodists perceived “intemperance, slavery, and popery” as the “combined enemy of the United States.”23

The Sentinel particularly incited Methodist wrath with such editorial remarks as: “We indignantly repudiate that doctrine of temperance which prescribes a general abstinence from ardent liquors,” and, “we have reason to think that the world would be just as sober and moral as it is, had there never been such arch hypocrites, as generally compose the Bible and Temperance Societies, suffered to practice their deceitful wiles on the credulity of mankind.”24

The Herald, representing all the suspicion and irascibility of its New England Methodist constituency, lashed out at what it perceived to be the un-Christian and unpatriotic views of the Sentinel. The reaction from one Herald reader reflected Methodist support of the paper's position:

Mr. Editor — I am glad to see that you have the moral courage to come out and notice the false and treacherous assertion of the Catholic Sentinel, in regard to the Temperance reform, and the honest and disinterested citizens who advocate that worthy and benevolent cause. It is to be regretted that such a shameful attack upon the moral sense of the community should pass unnoticed by the whole of the Boston press (with the exception of the Herald).25

The Cresting of New England Temperance Fervor

As New England Methodists elected delegates to the 1836 General Conference, slavery was becoming the burning social reform issue. Temperance reform sentiments remained strong, but were overshadowed by a battle within the Annual Conference between abolitionists (such as

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15ZH, Volume V, No. 12 (March 19, 1834).
16ZH, Volume VI, No. 5 (February 4, 1835).
17Quoted in ZH, Volume VI, No. 10 (March 11, 1835).
18ZH, Volume VI, No. 11, (March 18, 1835).
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*CAJZH, Volume VI, No. 22 (January 27, 1832).
*ZH, Volume V, No. 19 (May 7, 1834).
*ZH, Volume VI, No. 17 (April 29, 1835).
*ZH, Volume V, No. 12 (March 19, 1834).
*ZH, Volume VI, No. 5 (February 4, 1835).
*Quoted in ZH, Volume VI, No. 10 (March 11, 1835).
*ZH, Volume VI, No. 11, (March 18, 1835).
Sunderland, Scott) and colonizationists (such as Fisk). Furthermore, despite the near-unanimous support of New England delegates, the 1836 General Conference did not restore Wesley's rule on intoxicating beverages to the Discipline of the church. The vote of delegates on the issue was two-to-one in favor of restoring the rule, but on an obscure technicality, the rule was not restored.

At the New England Conference, however, the abolitionist and colonizationist factions put aside their harsh words long enough to unite on the issue of temperance. "A resolution in favor of abstinence from all intoxicating liquors was passed." No longer could one be a true New England Methodist and not subscribe to the "entire abstinence" doctrine. The Conference Temperance Society had been a voluntary society. Now membership in New England Methodism was in part contingent upon an acceptance of that Society's fundamental principles. The conference had established a rule on temperance even more stringent than Wesley's rule, which the General Conference would not restore until 1848.

Despite concern with other social problems, New England Methodists remained in the forefront of their denomination's quest to suppress intemperance:

"Why," we have been asked, "do you publish so much upon this sordid subject?"...Because half a million drunkards are yet unsaved. Because the children and wives, and relatives of those drunkards, are under the influence of a soul-destroying example....Because idolatry, profanity, Sabbath-breaking, abuse of parents, murder, adultery, theft, false witness, and covetousness are among the fruits of drunkenness. Those are the reasons that compel us to "cry aloud" against intemperance. THESE are the reasons why we will not relax one effort. THESE are the reasons we are "not tired of hearing and reading about intemperance."*

When in 1848 the General Conference finally restored Wesley's rule, Wilbur Fisk had been dead nearly a decade. His spirit and that of other temperance reformers lived on, however, as New England Methodists stood squarely in favor of the restoration of Wesley's rule. A heritage of temperance reform zeal had been distinctly established in New England Methodism between 1823 and 1836.

Nearly a century would pass before that zeal would significantly diminish — but the temperance advocacy of Wilbur Fisk and others of the New England Conference provided support for a part of Methodist practice that remains alive even in today's American society.