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"IN THE LIGHT OF ETERNITY": THE SOUTHERN METHODIST CHURCH IN ILLINOIS

RICHARD A. CHRISMAN

Just one hundred and fifty years ago the tensions within the Methodist Episcopal Church led to division, culminating a half-century of increasing acceptance of slavery on one hand and a growing desire to limit or remove it on the other. From the beginning the Methodist Episcopal Church frowned upon slavery, but as southern churchmen came to accept slavery not only as a necessity, but as a positive good, and abolitionist agitation became ever more strident, the stage was set for a major confrontation. Southern Methodists would no longer accept northern moralizing and "political preaching," and northerners found it impossible to longer "prostrate [themselves] in groveling obeisance at the foot of slavery."[1]

The issue which brought the matter to a head was the case of Bishop James Andrew at the 1844 General Conference. State laws would not allow him to emancipate some slaves he had acquired through marriage, and his fellow delegates refused to let him resign, while a bloc of northern delegates insisted they could not accept the jurisdiction of a slave-holding bishop. They could not tolerate the "nationalizing" of slavery—it had already spread far enough. When Bishop Andrew was in effect suspended, southern delegates began agitation for some sort of division of the church. A so-called "Plan of Separation," created by a "Committee of Nine," of which Illinois's Peter Akers was a member, was agreed upon, but to be used only if conditions in the southern churches made continued unity impossible. Akers believed that the southern brethren would do everything in their power to prevent a division, and would not use the plan unless it was absolutely necessary.

Peter Cartwright, along with a few others, vehemently opposed the plan. He felt it was not only unconstitutional, since the annual conferences had to vote on a change of rules first, but that it would create strife in border conferences and set a bad precedent.[2] Nevertheless the plan passed, 136 to 15. After the close of the General Conference he led the fight to thwart its implementation through asking the annual conferences to vote against the change in the Sixth Restrictive Rule which was necessary for the division to take place. The conferences turned down the rule change, declaring the division of the church illegal, northern leaders calling it instead a secession. Many felt

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[1]*Northwestern Christian Advocate*, August 29, 1866.

[2]James M. Buckley, *A History of Methodism in the United States*, Vol. II (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1898), 92.

the southern Methodists had already planned to divide the church and were just waiting for an occasion, and the Bishop Andrew affair provided it. In support of this view, it appears that no effort was made to overcome problems in the churches, instead the preachers immediately "moved for separation without consulting the people,"[3] calling a meeting in Louisville the following year to form a new church.

Cartwright and others greeted the division of the church with apprehension, fearing that it was setting a bad precedent. Cartwright said it presaged a division of the country, and even leaders outside the church, such as Henry Clay, saw its dangers. Clay, writing to a friend, said: "Scarcely any public occurrence has given me so much real concern. I would not say that it would necessarily produce dissolution of the political union of these states, but the example would be fraught with imminent danger."[4] John C. Calhoun noted in a Senate speech in 1850 "that three of the four religious bonds holding the nation together had snapped—Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist," with only the Protestant Episcopal holding together.[5] Indeed, some southern newspaper editors saw the division as a harbinger of national political division, but rather than being troubled were delighted with the prospect.[6]

Division of the nation did come in 1861, and most northern Methodist ministers readily identified the cause of preserving the Union with Christianity. Resolutions were adopted in all four Illinois conferences each year strongly supporting the government and calling upon all members to come to its defense, branding as traitors any who hesitated. Likewise, southern Methodist preachers were among the strongest supporters of the Confederacy.[7]

Through the period of years preceding the war, many settlers came into southern and central Illinois from Tennessee and Kentucky, from Virginia and the Carolinas. Not a few of these retained southern sympathies, and even those who did not actively support the southern cause were suspected by their Yankee neighbors, especially if they were Democrats. During the last two years or so of the war bitterness intensified, and demands to prove loyalty to the Union escalated, as well as opposition to and threats against "political preachers" who made these demands. Some Union-minded preachers carried pistols for their protection, and at least two churches, Long Creek, near Decatur, and Zion, in the Jacksonville District, were believed burned by southern sympathizers.

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[3]*Northern Christian Advocate*, June 6, 1894.

[4]Charles Baumer Swaney, *Episcopal Methodism and Slavery* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1926), 288.

[5]John A. Smith, "How Methodism Became a National Church," *Methodist History* XXX, 1 (October 1981), 27.

[6]Swaney, *Episcopal Methodism*, 287.

[7]G. Clinton Prim, "Southern Methodism in the Confederacy," *Methodist History* XXIII, 4 (July 1985), *passim.*

During this time and in the immediate post-war period, "hundreds," according to the southern Methodist Illinois Conference history, were expelled from the church because they were Democrats or sympathized with the South. Many such objected to the use of church buildings for "political" meetings, and to "political preaching." The history in the 1880 *Illinois Conference Journal [MECS]* states: "The pulpits, Sabbath after Sabbath, were polluted, and made to subserve the interests of their political party to the shameful neglect of the interest of immortal souls."[8]

Perhaps these southern-oriented Methodists were not just feeling concern for the fate of family and friends left behind, but had also become habituated to a view of religion and morality which had come to predominate in southern Methodism. One can only speculate as to why such a sharp division between religion and morality came about: perhaps it was partly because of the "perfectionism" which held that "true" Christians need no longer be concerned with morals, since the "perfect" heart would only will what is right, and needed no guidance. Perhaps also there was a subconscious desire to avoid moral pangs over slavery.

G. Clinton Prim summarized:

> The differences distinguishing northern and southern Methodists were not merely sectional as they were also separated by contrasting understanding of their function in society and the scope of their responsibility. The northern Methodists generally broadened their concept of Christian responsibility from evangelism to the belief that Christians must do battle for what is right. . . . Southern Methodists held to what they regarded as the "strictly Scriptural mission of the church." Southern editors urged their churches to "preach repentance and faith and holiness" and "allow the people who are competent to attend to the affairs of the Nation and the State."[9] What northern Methodists thought were essential Christian ethics, southerners viewed as "mere politics." Southern Methodists in Illinois interpreted their history, even many years later, not as an outgrowth of the conflict over slavery, but of different interpretations of church discipline.[10]

Southern-oriented Methodists in Illinois pictured themselves as a righteous minority, persecuted by the ungodly majority. Their history states:

> Under these circumstances many truly pious persons and a few ministers in the States of Illinois and Indiana left off attending church. They felt sorely grieved and were deeply distressed, being compelled to live without the means of grace. They hung their harps, as it were, upon the willows, and longed for the privileges of God's house without being disturbed by any of the behests of secret political conclaves, and for the gospel of the Prince of Peace unmixed with political fanaticism.[11]

While the Methodist Episcopal Church detested what they thought of as disloyalty, and did eject some preachers, such as William C. Blundell, there was an effort made to keep retaliations under control. In 1864, for example,

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[8]"Historical," *Proceedings of the Illinois Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South*, 4.

[9]Prim, "Southern Methodism," 240.

[10]"Historical," 3.

[11]"Historical," 4.

Rev. W. J. Stubbles was found guilty of maladministration because of writing "such words as Copperheads upon Church Records, as [he] has done upon those of Whitfield Circuit, and we hereby order them expunged."[12]

The origins of the southern Methodist Conference in Illinois can be found in both central and southern Illinois. A meeting was held January 21, 1864, in the court house in Lacon, Marshall County, Illinois, at the call of several dissatisfied Methodists, Rev. Ira Norris being elected chairman and Rev. C. B. Shulenberger secretary. One of the signers of the call, Rev. Rumsey Smithson, was expelled from the Central Illinois Conference as a result of his participation in the meeting.[13] When the adjourned meeting reconvened February 11, a communication from sixty-nine people from Magnolia, Putnam County, urged the leaders "to adopt measures for the promotion of religious societies throughout the state, which should be free from political agitations."[14] Efforts moved forward to form an organization, with Smithson, Norris, and F. M. Mills named to a committee to draft an organizational plan. Thus, the Illinois Christian Association was born.

Shortly the association accepted the Wenona Seminary, which two local men had organized in 1858, but it later had to be sold to remove its indebtedness.[15] The two-story seminary continued to flourish, however, and remained in use until it burned around the turn of the century. Turnstiles through the heavy wooden fence allowed entrance into the five-acre grounds, which also included among its various outbuildings homes for the president and teachers.[16]

Another meeting was called for August, the announcement reading:

> NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT—So great has become the intolerance of the political priests who control most of our churches, and so effectively has abolitionism banished religion from their precincts, that many of those in whose bosoms still lingers a love for the old principles of pure christianity have felt it to be an imperative duty to organize a new ecclesiastical body, which shall be an asylum for those who have been proscribed and excluded from the abolition synagogue into which the preachers have converted many churches. This new organization has sprung at once into vigorous vitality, and is already a life [sic] and a success. A meeting to enhance the interests and perfect the organization of the new society will be held at Wenona, Marshall county, Ill., on the 18th, 19th and 20th of August. Any information regarding the enterprise can be obtained by addressing Ira Norris, Lacon, Ill.[17]

At the meeting a representative of the movement in Ohio, Rev. J. F. Given, gave an address. As a result, the name of the organization in Illinois was changed to resemble that in Ohio, and became known as the Christian

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[12]*Journal of the Central Illinois Conference (MEC), 1864*, 28.
[13]W. T. Mathis, *Organization of the Illinois Conference of the M.E. Church, South* (privately printed, 1927), 20.
[14]Mathis, *Illinois Conference*, 23.
[15]Mathis, *Illinois Conference*, 31.
[16]Marilyn Rasmusen, Ed., *LaSalle County Lore*, LaSalle County Historical Society, n.d., printed at Henry, Illinois, 250.
[17]*Daily State Register*, July 27, 1864.

Union of Illinois. Learning that there were similar movements in Indiana and Iowa also, attempts were made to bring them into one organization, but the effort failed. The reason for the failure was the wish of one faction to have no doctrinal standards spelled out, while others felt the need for a definite statement of doctrine and polity. The Christian Union has survived as a denomination, and Given occupied a prominent place in it for many years.[18]

Meanwhile, unknown to the group forming in central Illinois, another began to form in southern Illinois. In the fall of 1863 a Rev. Aspley of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, from Missouri, made a preaching foray into the state, and organized a class at Nashville. Upon his return to Missouri, the work spread no further. During the following winter or spring, Rev. Jacob Ditzler visited his sister near Kinmundy, did some preaching, and announced a meeting of disaffected Methodists. Since few attended, nothing was done, but because those who did attend were dropped from the church records, discontent increased.[19]

Mr. A. C. Davis of Jackson County took Ditzler and another preacher named Myers "into his home after they were locked out of the M. E. Church. He opened a school house on his farm and they entered and began preaching. A great revival broke out and furnished the foundation of our work in Southern Illinois."[20]

The event which may have triggered the most interest in organizing a separate body came about one Sunday morning, in the church a few miles from Salem, when the preacher came into the church on his regular rounds, and laying a revolver upon the pulpit beside the Bible, began to pray God's blessings upon the Union soldiers and "prayed that every rebel soldier might be massacred or wiped off the face of the earth." When Thomas J. Boring, who had sons in the Union army, objected to the tone of the prayer, the ensuing discussion ended the service for that day.[21]

Then in May Rev. J. W. Wescott issued a call in Marion County for a meeting to be held June 22 at the court house in Salem. At this meeting Rev. Thomas Middleton was elected chairman and Rev. T. D. Deeds, secretary. When Wescott stated he had withdrawn from the Methodist Episcopal Church, several other ministers announced they would do likewise, among them Middleton, Deeds, William Finley and James D. Gray. Several exhorters and other lay persons followed suit. A committee consisting of Wescott, Finley, Gray, Deeds, and Elijah Wimberly was appointed to draw up a draft of doctrines and discipline and to report at a meeting set for July. Their proposal for a church to be known as the Evangelical Church, Methodist in doctrine and congregational in government, was adopted.[22]

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[18]Kenneth O. Brown, "'Building Father's House Anew'—James F. Given and the Founding of the Christian Union," *Methodist History*, XX, 4 (July 1982), *passim.*

[19]Mathis, *Illinois Conference*, 42.

[20]*Illinois Conference Minutes, 1914 (MECS)*, 32.

[21]Mathis, *Illinois Conference*, 56.

[22]Mathis, *Illinois Conference*, 43, 44.

The first society formed with 26 former Methodists one mile south of Xenia, which came to be known as Pleasant Grove. Soon societies were started at a grove near Foxville, Union Camp Ground, Rome, Shiloh, Patoka, Kinmundy, and other places. In 1865 B. R. Hester settled in southern Illinois and began preaching and organizing churches in the Jackson County area as well.[23]

On September 22, 1865, the two groups met together at Xenia and united under the name of the Christian Union Church, "Methodistic both in doctrine and polity."[24] While those in the southern part of the state agreed unanimously, a faction in the north under the leadership of a Rev. Slack objected, and maintained a separate organization, which kept the Christian Union name. The united group, composed of an equal number of ministers and laymen, resolved to meet in conference at Clinton. At this gathering they also decided to have district conferences, thus "we may safely say that the Illinois Conference instituted, and brought into the Methodist Church, both lay representation and the district conference."[25]

The council of the Christian Union Church met at Clinton, September 12, 1866, to which the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, sent fraternal delegates, and the council voted to unite with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. At a meeting held in Clinton the following June the plan of union was adopted, and the next day Bishop Doggett officially admitted the group into the denomination under the name of Episcopal Methodist Church.

The first annual conference session was held at Nashville October 16, 1867.[26] At that there were 2504 members, 16 local preachers, and the following travelling preachers: John W. Westcott, Rumsey Smithson, Middleton R. Jones, Richard P. Holt, James D. Gray, William Howard, Thomas D. Deeds, David Rose, David L. Myers, Oscar Smithson, Joseph Howard, Daniel T. Sherman, Benjamin R. Hester, James R. Prickett, Jonas B. Frost, Absalom L. Davis, David Stanford, William Finley, and E. C. Jones. Admitted to the conference that year were Norman P. Halsey, P. D. Vandeventer, Benjamin Zumwalt, O. M. Samuels, Thomas L. Proctor, and several others on trial and readmitted.[27] Of these pioneers, conference historians rate Westcott as "the father of the conference. To him more than any other man does southern Methodism owe its existence in this state."[28]

In just a few years an educational institution seemed a necessity, for the leaders were concerned that the young people of the church develop both the intellect and the heart, and that this could be done only when the church was

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[23]Mathis, *Illinois Conference*, 45.
[24]Mathis, *Illinois Conference*, 49.
[25]Mathis, *Illinois Conference*, 50.
[26]Mathis, *Illinois Conference*, 101.
[27]*Minutes of the Illinois Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1867, passim.*
[28]*The Illinois Conference Annual,* 1907 (MECS), 27.

the educator.[29] "The end in view is to develop the powers of the mind and fix good habits, while the best possible influences shall be thrown around the pupil."[30] Furthermore, if this be left to other churches to perform they may be lost to the denomination. Accordingly, the 1872 conference requested proposals from communities interested in having such an institution. The citizens of Lewistown, Fulton County, offered to donate a four-acre tract with a four-story building 44 × 60 feet, which would accommodate 150 pupils as well as providing quarters for a principal and family. Perhaps this was the same building operated by the Central Illinois Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church from 1857 to 1861. The committee investigating the matter studied "the value of the property, healthfulness of the location, cost of living, and the chances of patronage" and concluded to accept the offer.[31] Lewistown was further lauded as "high, rolling and healthy," free from saloons, with "good church privileges," and citizens of "high moral character."[32] Furthermore, the college was "in the midst of friends."[33]

In 1873, preparations proceeded to open the Episcopal Methodist College. Prof. W. S. McKinney, for the preceding year principal of Belleville Collegiate Institute, St. Louis Conference, became principal, secured several other "competent teachers," and planned to open the school the last week of October 1873. The trustees' report noted that McKinney "comes among us highly recommended as a fine scholar, a good disciplinarian, and a successful educator." The walls of the fourth story of the building were raised to 14 feet, which became the chapel. A new roof and a "handsome" dome topped out the school.[34]

The conference had no debt on the building, but money was needed for furnishings. While the college did not open until November, it did get under way as planned, but not without some extra local help. The financial panic of 1873 severely hampered the work of the financial agent and money could not be raised for the furnishings. Moses Bordner, already having given liberally toward the purchase of the building, advanced the money necessary for furnishings. "The school rooms were furnished with comfortable desks and black-boards, and the spacious chapel is elegantly furnished."[35] The conference that year set the fourth Friday in November as a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer, "for a revival of religion throughout the Conference, and the blessings of Heaven upon the institution of learning."[36]

The four teachers served a total of 53 students during the first year, in the following categories: Primary 9, Preparatory 12, Academic 14, Collegiate 7,

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[29]*Minutes and Abstract of the Eighth Session of the Episcopal Methodist Church, 1874,* 24.
[30]*Ninth Session, Episcopal Methodist Church, 1875,* 32.
[31]*Seventh Session, 1873*, 21.
[32]*Eighth Session, 1874*, 37.
[33]*Ninth Session, 1875*, 25.
[34]*Seventh Session, 1873*, 21, 22.
[35]*Eighth Session, 1874*, 23.
[36]*Eighth Session, 1874*, 36.

Irregular 11. In addition to literary courses instruction was given in Music, Drawing, Painting and German. Three hundred books were secured for the library and mineral and natural history specimens procured. Prof. F. A. Taylor of the faculty donated mathematical instruments worth $50.[37]

The Conference Committee on Education resolved that the preachers bring the college before the people once a year, with a goal of fifty cents per member, and that they should preach at least annually "on the importance of moral and religious training in connection with mental culture."[38]

Soon the college wanted to expand. The local citizens in 1875 offered to provide 600,000 bricks for a 60 × 100 foot addition, if the work could be done within a year. Nothing more was heard of the project, but the college leaders were still confident of success. They reported a growth at the beginning of the third year from 20 at the opening of the first year, 42 the next year, and 62 at that time.[39]

Professor McKinney resigned at the end of three years, and John P. McLaughlin of Georgia succeeded him. The year began with high hopes but soon dissatisfaction began to appear and grew at an alarming rate until students began dropping out of school in such numbers that it was closed before the end of the academic year. Financial commitments could not be met and the faculty "were greatly straightened and embarrassed, without means to live or to get away."[40]

Because the conference seemed unable or unwilling to alleviate the situation, the property was turned back to the donors. Attempts were made to reopen in 1879, but were unsuccessful. Ten years later the Educational Report once again agitated unsuccessfully for a college, arguing that not having a college leads to division in families, as young people taught in colleges and academies operated by the different denominations tend to identify with them.[41]

The conference in 1873 counted 67 local preachers, 5,517 members, and 3595 Sunday School scholars. The preachers were required to pay 2½ per cent of their income less travel expenses for the support of widows and children.[42]

Up to 1878 the conference was known as the Illinois Conference of the Episcopal Methodist Church, but despite the claims of Mathis and J. Gordon Melton that it never adopted the Methodist Episcopal Church, South name the conference journal of that year reports that such action was taken: "*Resolved*, That the style and title of this Conference, dating from the beginning of the

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[37]*Eighth Session, 1874,* 25.
[38]*Eighth Session, 1874,* 27.
[39]*Eighth Session, 1874,* 25.
[40]*Eleventh Session, 1877,* 23, 24.
[41]*Journal and Proceedings of the Illinois Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1889,* 13, 14.
[42]*Seventh Session, 1873,* 18, 25.

present (Twelfth) Session, shall be Illinois Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South." The journals were so identified from then on.[43] The same year all the territory of the conference in the state of Indiana was set off as the Indiana Conference. Apparently some of the churches did not like the name change, passing resolutions of dissatisfaction the following year. That year Rev. Arnis Merrill, in charge of the Rushville Circuit, and a group of local preachers broke off and formed a separate organization. In 1880, authority was given the Presiding Elder and preachers of the Lewistown District "to enter into a process of law" to recover the houses of worship that were being denied them by certain parties in the churches.[44] The trouble must have spread, as each of the four presiding elders received $15 for defending the rights of church property in 1882.[45]

The bishop conducting the 1878 conference brought up the necessity of forming a Woman's Foreign Missionary Society in each church, and the first annual meeting of the conference organization took place in 1881.[46] By 1894 a Woman's Parsonage and Home Missionary Society was also in operation. Sensing the need for additional support for those dependent upon the conference, the 1900 conference authorized a "Widows' and Orphans' Memorial Fund."[47]

By the end of the century there were those who were conscious of the need to record their history, with an historical statement becoming a regular part of the conference journal each year. The conference asked Bishop O. P. Fitzgerald to write a history of the conference, but this apparently was not done. Eventually, in 1927, Rev. W. T. Mathis did write such an account. Mathis seems to have been a dominant figure in the early years of the century, serving as a presiding elder, a delegate to general conference, editor of the conference journal and conference secretary.

Echoes of past conflicts reverberated through the conference from time to time, as well as in the northern church. One Methodist Episcopal minister, J. W. Lapham of Windsor Circuit, in his reply to conference historian James Leaton's request for information about his early pastorates wrote that "in the Lower Sandcreek neighborhood there was a small Methodist Church South house with a little rotten society as poison as rattlesnakes and as mad at the M. E. Church as hornets." W. T. Beadles noted two forms of opposition when he became presiding elder of the Quincy District: an "old fashioned fighting Campbellite and Southern Methodists."[48]

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[43]Mathis, *Illinois Conference,* 104; J. Gordon Melton, *Log Cabins to Steeples* (Nashville, Tennessee: The Commissions on Archives and History of the Northern, Central and Southern Illinois Conferences, 136; *Twelfth Session, 1878*, 4.

[44]*Fourteenth Session, 1880*, 9.

[45]*Sixteenth Session, 1882*, 16.

[46]*Fifteenth Session, 1881*, 28.

[47]*Thirty-fourth Session, 1900*, 24.

[48]Letter in the Archives of the Central Illinois Conference, Bloomington; *Diary of William Thomas Beadles*, a typewritten transcription, in the Central Illinois Conference Archives, Bloomington, 52.

The 1897 Illinois Conference South voted to memorialize the General Conference to remove the "South" from their name, saying that its presence hindered their work: "It seems to carry with it the implication of dead issues and seems to give geographic limitation to the work of our great church." The request was not granted.[49] The southern Methodist Publishing House had made a claim upon the federal government for the use of its property during the Civil War, which was paid, but the 1898 and 1899 conferences passed resolutions protesting what they understood was misrepresentation in making the claim.[50]

Border conflicts continued well into the 20th century, with the 1914 conference adopting this resolution:

> Our Conference has for eight years maintained and held strictly to the ruling of the Federal Commission but our M. E. Brethren refuse to meet with us to adjust differences and continue to come into our field, disrupting our organizations and building M. E. Churches with money raised for our work; We recommend that the Conference Commission be dissolved.[51]

Nevertheless, the conference leaders felt there was much opportunity for growth in the rural areas, as many towns of 200 to 500 had no church or no Methodist Church, and that in prosecuting these efforts they were not "arraying Methodism against Methodism, not setting up altar against altar, but endeavoring to give the gospel to the needy," and asked in 1901 that the denomination come to their assistance by making them a missionary conference and requested missionary funds in the amount of $3,000 in 1910.[52]

Despite the church's reluctance to get involved in social issues, it was not opposed to taking stands on personal morality, and the conference sent a memorial to General Conference in 1897 to prohibit ministers from becoming members of the conference if they used tobacco.[53]

A group of women in the churches requested the conference to vote favorably on the constitutional change necessary to allow women to become full lay members of the conference in 1918. The General Conference had approved the inclusion of women, contingent upon the annual conferences approving the change in the constitution which would allow it.[54]

Depression conditions were reflected in the 1931 report of the presiding elder of the Waverly District:

> Finances are low all over the district. It could scarcely be otherwise when every charge, save one, and practically every church has been effected by from one to three bank failures. I have spent much of my life in Central Illinois and never have I seen before a time when the farmers had so little money. The most of them are not only without money, but their farms are under mortgage.

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[49]*Thirty-first Session, 1897*, 22.
[50]*Thirty-second Session, 1898*, 26, 27; *Thirty-third Session, 1899*, 27, 28.
[51]*Illinois Conference Minutes, 1914 (MECS)*, 22.
[52]*Illinois Conference, 1901*, 18.
[53]*Thirty-first Session, 1897*, 15.
[54]*Illinois Conference, 1918*, 29.

Even under these conditions a small increase in membership occurred, but no property improvements were made.[55]

Discussions on union with the Methodist Episcopal Church, which had been on and off for about seventy years, came to fruition in 1938, with union to take place in 1939. At its last session in 1939, the following Waverly District charges and their churches were in the area of the present Central Illinois Conference: Buckhorn: Buckhorn, Fish Hook, and Morrellville; Casey: Palestine and Casey; Dennison: Armstrong, Dennison, Dunlap, and Patton; El Dara: Dutch Creek and El Dara; Girard: New Hope and Union Chapel; Henton: Center, Henton, and Robinson Creek; Rushville: Bethel, Marietta, McTyeire, Mt. Carmel, Mt. Zion and Union Chapel; Waverly: Clarksdale, Providence and Waverly. Of these churches, Fishhook, Armstrong, Patton, El Dara, and New Hope were still functioning in 1994.

One of the last ministers to be ordained by the conference was Keely Kepner, who entered the Illinois Conference in 1930 and served in Central Illinois Conference after union until retirement in 1960. He died March 5, 1992. Other members of the conference who became a part of the Central Illinois Conference at the time of union include Edwin R. Cory, William D. Humphrey, Grover C. Morehead, Orville T. Rogers, and Andrew E. Thomas. Ralph Dean and Carol Victor Lanius transferred into the Illinois Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church earlier.

The Illinois Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South served a mostly rural constituency, never growing to be a large conference, but still providing a useful ministry. Their demographic problems were apparent as early as 1880, when the historical report noted that they had transferred around forty preachers to other conferences, as well as many lay members. "Our geographical position is such that hundreds of members annually emigrate South, Southwest and West, and thus help to swell our numbers elsewhere. . . . Hence our Statistical Tables never give us full credit for the work we have done. In the light of eternity only will our record be known."[56]

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[55]*Illinois Conference, 1931*, 20.
[56]*Fourteenth Session, 1880*, 4.