

# METHODIST HISTORY

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Number 1



PROTEST AGAINST CHURCH SEGREGATION (1964)



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Alfred T. Day III, Editor

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Manuscripts submitted for publication and all other correspondence should be addressed to  
Editor: METHODIST HISTORY, P.O. Box 127, Madison, NJ 07940. Prospective authors are  
advised to write for guidelines or visit [www.gc.ah.org](http://www.gc.ah.org).

## CONTRIBUTORS

ROBERT W. SLEDGE is Distinguished Professor of History emeritus at McMurry University in Abilene, Texas, currently serving as University Historian. He was the first president of the Historical Society of the United Methodist Church. Among his writings are *Hands on the Ark* (1975) and *Five Dollars and Myself: The History of Mission in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1845-1939* (2005). He is a retired elder in the Rio Texas Conference.

IAN B. STRAKER is a clergy member of the New York Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. He earned a B.A. in Afro-American Studies at Yale University and an M.Div. from the Yale Divinity School. He pastored churches in NY before beginning doctoral studies in American Religious History in the Dept. of Religion at Princeton University. He is currently completing a full length biography of the early Methodist Circuit Rider, Freeborn Garrettson.

MARTIN D. MCLEE (1955-2014) was consecrated as Bishop on July 19, 2012, and assigned to the New York Area. Bishop McLee earned the M. Div. from Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas; the J.D. from the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University, Houston; the Master of Science degree in Education from Fordham University, and the Bachelor of Science degree in Health (with honors) from Hunter College—both in New York City.

DAVID O. WHITE (1938-2012) served as the Chair of the New England Conference Commission on Archives and History, President of the Tolland Historical Society, and Treasurer of the Association for the Study of Connecticut History. White worked at both the Connecticut Historical Commission and the Connecticut State Library until his retirement. He was the author of a book entitled, *Connecticut's Black Soldiers 1775-1783*.

PATRICIA J. THOMPSON is a retired elder in the New England Conference, Chair of the New England Conference Commission on Archives and History, and Conference Historian. She is the author of *The History of Maine Methodism Through the Women's Sphere; Roots and Wings: 200 Years of Methodism in Maine 1793-1993; Courageous Past, Bold Future: The Journey Toward Full Clergy Rights in The United Methodist Church*; and several local church histories.

WILLIAM BOBBY MCCLAIN is a United Methodist ordained elder and Professor Emeritus of Preaching and Worship at Wesley Theological Seminary. He earned his B.A. at Clark College, Atlanta, and masters and doctoral degrees from Boston University School of Theology. McClain is the author of *Traveling Light: Christian Perspectives in Pluralism* (1981); *Black People in the Methodist Church: Whither Thou Goest* (1985); and with the late Dr. Grant Shockley and Dr. Karen Collier *Heritage and Hope: African Presence in Methodism* (1991).

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Recently I joined with a group of scholars and United Methodist agency general secretaries for conversation on the topic: "Methodism's Enduring Racial Dilemmas."

We came together because several American Methodisms will mark a bicentennial and centennial of two ethically, historically, sociologically, and theologically infamous, unhappy denominational events in 2016. Next year will be the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of American Methodism's first racial divide. In 1816, the simmering racial and racist divisions in the brand new Methodist Episcopal Church spilled-over, giving American society the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

2016 will also mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first formal, serious, and sustained conversations between the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS). Several years of high-level meetings between the MEC and MECS, via a Joint Commission on Union, began laying-out the racially-charged union that became the segregated, jurisdictional Methodist Church (1939).

One of the outcomes of the conversation referenced above is the launch of a scholarly conference slated for 2017. The working title: "Racism as Methodism's 'Great' Heritage."

Obviously the "great" in that title has nothing to do with racism's eminence, rather its formidability, intensity, and magnitude in the course of Methodism's history. This issue of *Methodist History* is both evidence of that fact, witness to a continuing struggle, and willingness to be engaged in complex matters where, as Methodist involvement in the communities of Ferguson, Baltimore, Charleston and the Black Lives Matter movement remind us, neither history nor the God in whose love Methodists seek to be perfected, is finished with us yet.

Rob Sledge's essay offers a challenge to mainstream thinking about the creation of the Central Jurisdiction (1939). It questions the commonly held assertion that the newly-created structure reuniting slavery-separated Methodists (1844) was an unwarranted concession by Northern whites to the racism of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, not to mention a setback to improving race relations.

Given the controversial nature of Sledge's position, I intentionally made the editorial decision that a response from an African-American Church Historian was needed. Ian Straker, a member of the Editorial Board of *Methodist History*, gives just such a viewpoint, adding balance and critical perspective to further the ongoing dialogue.

Bishop Martin McLee (1955-2014) and Pat Thompson's unusual, time-

less collaboration is an important contribution to both the communion of the saints and chronicle of historic Methodist preachers. Meet John Newton Mars, the first African American ordained in the New England Conference.

William “Bobby” McClain’s offering is from an impassioned, powerful, and provocative speech delivered to the Eighth Convocation of the Historical Society of The United Methodist Church, meeting this past summer at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. His work considers why African Americans were first attracted to and even more significantly, in the present day, remain so fiercely devoted to The United Methodist Church after years of disregard, dismissal, segregation, and political compromise.

I look forward to the planned gathering of scholars and church agency leaders coming together in 2017 to further explore and discuss “Racism as Methodism’s ‘Great’ Heritage.”

I am pleased to offer this timely issue of *Methodist History* to add to the discourse. May even more enlightened and enlivening dialogue and redemptive action follow.

Alfred T. Day III, General Secretary  
October, 2015

#### *ERRATUM*

We regret the typo on page 227 of the July, 2015, issue of *Methodist History*. The first paragraph indicating Rev. Jason Lee’s entry into the mission field of Oregon with his cohort was 1834, not 1854.