Bishop Levi Scott (1802-1882)
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EDITOR’S NOTE

It appeared as a postscript at the bottom of an e-mail—one of those quotes a sender places below their signature—ending the communication with a word of wisdom or inspiration. Sometimes it is a verse of scripture or a line from great literature. This particular postscript quoted a historian so it likely appeared in my General Commission on Archives and History inbox:

Every renewal of the church, every great age in history has been grounded in a renewed reading of history. – Justo Gonzalez

Justo is not only a friend and important contributor to this journal, he is also a leading scholar in the areas of Christian, denominational, and particularly Hispanic-Latino church history. His words about the rejuvenating and reforming powers of reading church history breathe new life into this and every issue of *Methodist History*.

Ted Campbell’s “The Challenges of Being a Local Church Historian” speaks to the quickening power and influence of local church histories and historians. The essay offers a broad perspective on the unsung work of local church chroniclers, including seven particular challenges that local-church historians face: telling the truth, documenting our histories, using primary historical documents, using standard resources for local church and broader history, contextualizing our narratives, organizing our narratives, and writing our narratives. The author encourages historians to begin writing early in the process of their research: only writing tells how much research is left to be done! The result of their work is much more than a recitation of the past but formative, even transformative for congregational visioning of the future.

Russell Richey’s “Methodism in the American Forest: Living in, but Seeing through and beyond, Nature” addresses the reviving effects Methodists experienced in the American woodland. When crowds exceeded the capacity of a home or chapel, Wesley’s preachers gathered American listeners in the shade—cathedraled in a stately forest or under an oak’s embracing branches. The preachers also found the woods a place for solitude, prayer, and devotions. As Francis Asbury and cohorts took Methodism into sparsely-settled areas and particularly as they followed the frontier west, they also found forests to be wilderness, full of dangers, some life-threatening, a challenge. All three experiences of the American woodland: shady preaching spot—the wooded retreat for prayer, or dark and sometimes dangerous forest challenging to itinerant preachers—stimulated early American Methodism.

Joseph DiPaolo’s “So Shall Their Chains Fall Off”: Bishop Levi Scott and Nineteenth-Century Black Methodism” refreshes awareness of little-re-
membered Bishop Levi Scott (1802-1882), who played a prominent role in the struggle of African Americans for recognition and status within the ME Church during the mid-nineteenth century. Converted in the home of a free black, Scott was elected to the episcopacy in 1852, and provided stimulating leadership for the denomination amid the difficult days of slavery, Civil War and Reconstruction. He was the first ME bishop to superintend an annual conference session outside the continental United States (in Liberia); the first to oversee organized conferences of black preachers in the USA; and founder today’s Morgan State University, the largest historically black university in Maryland. This article is the first significant treatment of Scott’s life and contributions since the 1880s.

David Mitchell’s “The Making of Modern Education: Methodists Claflin University, 1869-1913,” examines the Methodists’ debate over the idea of “modern” education in late nineteenth-century South Carolina. The result of this discourse reshaped higher education in the state. Ironically, Claflin University—a historically black college touted for its strong liberal arts programming—was among the state’s first colleges to adopt a science and engineering curriculum. As Claflin prospered, it compelled white South Carolinians to begrudgingly invest in their own public education. Methodist leaders played an important role in helping citizens reconcile their racially and religiously conservative ideals with the promises of a New South.

May your reading of July’s Methodist History be full of spiritual, intellectual, and seasonal renewal.

Alfred T. Day III