

THE SECOND RISE OF METHODISM: GEORGIA

RICHARD P. HEITZENRATER

In his *Short History of Methodism* (1765), John Wesley begins his narrative by saying: "It is not easy to reckon up the various accounts which have been given of the people called Methodists." Part of the reason why there was a variety of accounts, of course, was that there were many differing opinions of the Methodists in that day, which resulted in quite different portraits of the history, nature, and design of the movement. Interestingly enough, John Wesley himself is the source of some inaccuracies that have been perpetuated in even the best of Methodist historical writing over the years.

History is, of course, more than the mere recapturing and reiterating of facts—a procession of names, dates, and events that can be listed on a timeline or punched out on a computerized exam. Certainly, history is built upon the "what, where, who, and when" of the past, but historical reflection is primarily concerned (I would contend) with the "how and why" of these developments. Historians try to explain the *dynamics* of human events. Such interpretation of the past involves more than simply the chronicling of the past.

Careful historical work, of course, depends upon the gathering of accurate facts upon which to reflect. Misinformation can throw off the best of analytical intentions. On the other hand, a contrived *interpretive* view may affect the presentation of the factual information so as to leave the data rather easily misconstrued. The latter is often the case when the topic is a controversial event, person, or movement (whether viewed by opponents *or* friends of the subject). So in looking at historical data and interpretations, we must consider the source as well as the information, and proceed very carefully to reconstruct the events accurately before we start to analyze them.

This presentation is a brief exercise or demonstration that tries to show the role that Wesley's diaries (and other *private* documents) can play in the attempt to understand early Methodist history—not just to help reinterpret it (same data, new look), but actually to help get the story straight, in some cases for the first time. The focus of concern here is the actual organizational developments of Methodism in Georgia under Wesley—the rise and development of the Methodist societies in Georgia. We will look at the basic accounts of Georgia Methodism, grounded in Wesley's *Journal* and other published writings (i.e., *public* documents), and then bring other contemporary material to bear upon a revised view of the history of "the second rise of Methodism."

We should note from the outset that Wesley occasionally admitted that his memory and judgment were less than perfect. In January, 1765, he wrote to the editor of the *London Magazine*, "When I was young, I was sure of everything; in a few years, having been mistaken a thousand times, I was not half so sure of most things as I was before; at present I am hardly sure of anything but what God has revealed to man."¹ Within months, however, he had overcome this momentary lapse of humility when he published his *Short History of Methodism* (1765), which (as he said) was "not designed for a defence of the Methodists" but was "a bare relation of a series of naked facts, which alone may remove abundance of misunderstandings."² He was even less humble or hesitant some twelve years later when he wrote his sermon for the laying of the foundation stone at City Road Chapel:

There is no other person, if I decline the task, who can supply my place—who had a perfect knowledge of the work in question [Methodism], from the beginning of it to this day.³

Four years later, in his "Short History of the People Called Methodists" (1781), John Wesley penned "as clear an account of it" as possible, as he said, since "no other person can be so well acquainted with Methodism, so called, as I am."⁴

In that work he described the beginnings of Methodism in Georgia forty-five years earlier in the typically clear-cut terms of the aging patriarch: "The second [rise of Methodism] was in Savannah, in April 1736, when twenty or thirty persons met at my house." This is part of his threefold scheme of the "rises" of Methodism—at Oxford (1729), Georgia (1736), and London (Fetter Lane Society, 1738). In this "Short History," he also gave a few more details to help pinpoint these developments further:

Sunday, March 7, 1736, finding there was not yet any opportunity of going to the Indians [having just landed four weeks earlier], I entered upon my ministry at Savannah. . . . My brother followed the same rule, whether he was at Frederica or Savannah. Sunday, April 4, I embarked for Frederica, hearing my brother was ill, and brought him with me to Savannah on Tuesday the 20th. I now advised the serious part of the congregation to form themselves into a sort of little society, and to meet once or twice a week in order to instruct, exhort, and reprove one another. And out of these I selected a smaller number for a more intimate union with each other: in order to which I met them together at my house every Sunday in the afternoon.⁵

¹*The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. John Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 4:286.

²*The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 9:368. One does not have to use much imagination to note that what begins as a seeming claim for objectivity ends in the manner of most defensive works, namely with the claim that *this* is the *right* story.

³Sermon 112, *Works*, 3:580.

⁴*Works*, 9:426.

⁵*Works*, 9:428-29.

This recollection is based upon the *Journal* entry for April 20, 1736, published some forty years earlier:

Not finding as yet any door open for the pursuing of our main design [going to the Indians], we considered in what manner we might be most useful to the little flock at Savannah. And we agreed: first, to advise the more serious among them to form themselves into a sort of little society and to meet once or twice a week in order to reprove, instruct, and exhort one another; second, to select out of these a smaller number for a more intimate union with each other, which might be forwarded, partly by our conversing singly with each, and partly by inviting them all together to our house; and this accordingly we determined to do every Sunday in the afternoon.⁶

This account has provided the basis for almost all the comments made by historians about the beginnings of the Methodist societies in Georgia, which by and large simply summarize the whole colonial episode by saying that it was a disaster, Wesley's High Church Oxford background being totally unsuited to the rough Georgia frontier.⁷ The documents from the Georgia period, however, indicate not only that these latter-day reflections may be a bit hastily overstated, but also that Wesley's own historical recollections, though not necessarily incorrect, are incomplete and misleading in the way they are stated.

A careful reader will notice that everything in the "Short History" account is said (1) in the plural — *we* agreed," *our* conversing," and "*our* house"; and is said (2) in terms of "agreeing" and "advising" the people to do something, and "determining to do" it, rather than actually saying that they did it. An examination of the diaries can help us understand why Wesley's journal account was not simply focused on himself and was couched in such tentative language.

One's first inclination to test out these statements would lead to an examination of the diary entries for the period in question, April 20 and following, where one might expect to find mention of society meetings once or twice a week and meetings of a smaller group on Sunday evenings at Wesley's house.

The nature of the diaries is such that the reader does not simply find a notation, "the first Methodist society of Savannah met," or "the small group came for intimate union with each other." The diary-keeping method

⁶*Works*, 18:157. This scenario is essentially the same as his description of events in Georgia published later in his "Short History," 5, both in terms of "agreeing" to this action and in terms of first having "advised" the people to do this; but then he slips into the assumption that they actually began to meet every Sunday, with him alone being the determinative force rather than the plural "we" and "our" of the earlier account (see passage as quoted above, *Works*, 9:428-29).

⁷Even the best studies of Wesley (e.g., by Albert Outler, Frank Baker, and Rupert Davies, as well as recent biographies by V. H. H. Green, Martin Schmidt, and Stanley Ayling) virtually ignore the organizational aspects of Methodist developments in Georgia. Most of the stories about Georgia focus on Wesley's spiritual development and his problems with Sophy Hopkey.

that Wesley had developed over the previous five years of group meetings in Oxford was such that he would simply note a key name (or names) of a friend, followed by "etc." (which indicates a group), and then a notation of the group's activity, from which could be determined the nature of the group. Such an entry at Oxford might read, "7:00 At Hall's, Clayton, etc., religious talk, tea, read Francke." Careful analysis of the pattern of such entries helps disclose whether or not this was a regular meeting with some continuity of activity. Careful analysis of such entries can also reveal who the members of the group were and where they met, as well as what they were doing.

Looking at Wesley's Georgia diaries, we discover that, in fact, during the weeks following April 20, 1736 (actually for about five months), there is no indication whatsoever that Wesley was in any way involved in the meetings of any society at Savannah during the week or any groups on Sundays, and certainly was not meeting regularly with "twenty or thirty persons" or having a group at his house every Sunday afternoon.⁸ Who was it, then, that "agreed" to advise the more serious among them to form a society? Who did they advise to do that? And when did they do it?

The First Religious Society at Savannah

The contemporary diaries and letters give us some help in answering these questions. In early May, Wesley noted in his diary that on one occasion when his Oxford friend Benjamin Ingham was at his home, they had "religious talk" and "agreed."⁹ He does not say what they agreed to, but this comment in the *Journal* (at just about the same time as the agreement to advise the more serious parishioners to form a society) is the only connection in Wesley's writings that I have been able to make with this entry. Ingham's own account of events at the time, however, helps us fill in some of the details of these developments.

In early April while Wesley was out of town, Ingham (who had taken over the care of the Savannah parish in Wesley's absence) had discovered a small society that was meeting there. Writing to his mother shortly afterward, Ingham says that on April 11 (over a week before Wesley's return on the 20th) he visited "a few people who had formed themselves into a society," the design of which was to meet on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday evenings in order to read, pray, and sing psalms together (bearing a striking resemblance to Wesley's description of the society supposedly begun in April, meeting twice during the week and once on Sunday).

⁸On board the *Simmonds*, he noted occasional groups meeting for study, religious conversation, or prayer, such as (1) Charles, etc; Ingham, etc; or Delamotte, etc — their group of four; (2) Hird, etc; (3) Mrs Lawley, etc; (4) Tackner, etc. No regularity or continuity seems to have developed from these occasional gatherings, which disappear during the last few weeks at sea and do not reoccur at their landing in Georgia.

⁹Georgia Diary 2 (9 May 1736), *Works*, 18:383.

Ingham says that he encouraged them in their endeavors, to which end he agreed to meet with them whenever possible.¹⁰

Where did this little society come from? It obviously pre-dates both Wesley and Ingham in its origins. From other contemporary correspondence we discover that this group was very likely the society begun in May, 1735 under Samuel Quincy, Wesley's predecessor as parish priest of Savannah. Quincy had reported to the secretary of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in July, 1735 that he had encouraged the parish clerk,

who is a sober young man, upon getting a Society of other young men to meet every Sunday night, which they have done for six weeks; seven or eight of them, after the example of some Societies in London. Their method [!] is to read the epistle and gospel for the day with comments upon them, to say the Evening Service with a collect composed for the occasion, and confer on what they have heard [i.e., religious conference].¹¹

The clerk thus mentioned was Robert Hows, a sawyer in Savannah and parish clerk for about two years before Wesley arrived in Georgia.¹² As parish clerk and a "tything-man," or petty constable, he was responsible for such things as enforcing the observance of the Sabbath in Savannah.

The growth of such societies of laity had been common within the Church of England for at least a generation, although many leaders thought that such groups could benefit from the occasional, if not constant, guidance of the clergy. Newman's response to Quincy for the SPCK (dated October 19, 1735) says as much: "The method you have taken to form a Religious Society we hope will be attended with good effects, especially if you can spare time to inspect and conduct them in their conferences to their edification."¹³ Newman's letter to Quincy also introduced to him some volunteer missionaries (the Wesleys and Ingham), adding that these gentlemen (who were at that point on board ship ready to go to Georgia) "will undoubtedly be always ready to assist you in your labours to cultivate a sense of religion among the Europeans in your settlement, and if possible among the natives who for many ages have lived in the utmost darkness."

¹⁰Which he was able to do at least every Sunday before he wrote the letter to his mother. Letter of 1 May 1736, in Luke Tyerman, *The Oxford Methodists* (New York: Harper, 1873), 79.

¹¹George Fenwick Jones, ed., *Henry Newman's Salzburger Letterbooks* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1966), 588. It is interesting to observe that Quincy was still in Savannah at the time Ingham was writing; he did not move out of the priest's house until May 15.

¹²See Wesley's letter to the Georgia Trustees, March 31, 1737, shortly after Hows' house burned down. *Works*, 25:504.

¹³Jones, *Newman's Letterbooks*, 178. Quincy was under some criticism at the time, apparently having left the parish in the hands of a wheelright to conduct services in his absence, "a behavior the Trustees could not excuse." The wheelright was apparently Thomas Young, who signed his name on some contemporary petitions with an "X." Hows also relates that as parish clerk he was called from his work to bury the dead (see n. 34 below).

The Methodist missionaries, who arrived in February, 1736, make no mention of the little society in Savannah until Ingham's comments two months later in April. Although Wesley seems to have heard about this group in late April from Ingham (who actually joined with them occasionally to encourage them),¹⁴ Wesley himself does not seem to have any direct or regular contact with the group for at least five months, much of which time he was in Frederica.

Ingham, then, is the first of the Wesleyans to notice such a group. If we look at Wesley's diary, we notice that on April 20, John Wesley arrived back in Savannah after a three-week trip to Frederica. The first person he talked to was Quincy, and that evening he had "religious talk" with Ingham, who was sharing the clerical functions in Savannah during this time. The impression that any agreement "to advise" (and to "determine to do") actually initiated the Savannah society at about this point, and thus Methodism in Georgia, is a bit misleading, however, given Ingham's account of the society's independent rise and in fact its possible previous existence in some form for perhaps as long as nine months. Wesley's diary, in any case, has no indication of his participation in any Sunday evening (afternoon) sessions at his house in Savannah for several weeks, and no participation in regular group meetings of this sort in Savannah until September. He was, in fact, gone from Savannah after May 18 for all but four weeks (those mostly in July) before September. On May 11 he did begin meeting with Ingham and Delamotte most days in the mid-afternoon, when they prayed, sang, and had religious talk. If Ingham was meeting weekly with the society, there is no hint of it in Wesley's diary.

The First Methodist Society at Frederica

A significant development occurred, however, when Wesley went to Frederica at the end of May. Frederica was a new town being carved out of the woods on St. Simons Island by the colonists who had sailed on the *Simmonds* with the Wesleys. John's *Journal* reports a crucial development in that setting:

We began to *execute* at Frederica what we had before *agreed* to do at Savannah [ed. ital.]. Our design was, on Sundays in the afternoon and every evening after public service, to spend some time with the most serious of the communicants in singing, reading, and conversation. This evening [June 10] we had only Mark Hird. But on Sunday [June 13] Mr. Hird and two more desired to be admitted. After a psalm and a little conversation, I read Mr. Law's *Christian Perfection* and concluded with another psalm.¹⁵

¹⁴Ingham told his mother that he had been able to meet with the group every Sunday (i.e., at least the two intervening Sundays before he wrote the letter on May 1); see Tyerman, *Oxford Methodists*, 79.

¹⁵June 10, 1736; *Works*, 18:160.

Wesley's diary displays almost exactly what his journal describes. He records for Thursday, June 10 in the evening: "8.45 Mark Hird, began singing. 9 Religious talk [until] 9.15." On Sunday, the larger group appears at Wesley's in mid-afternoon: "4 Mrs, Mark, Phoebe Hird, Betty Hassel came; tea, religious talk; sang. 5 Began *Christian Perfection*; sang."¹⁶

The two corrections that his diary makes to the *journal* account of the Sunday session are (1) that the meeting also included tea (a frequent feature of such meetings), and (2) that it was *Mrs.* Hird, not Mr. Hird, who attended on Sunday (a typical [more likely than typographical] error in the *Journal*).¹⁷ It might also be noted in passing how young these folks were: Mark was 21, Phoebe 17, and Betty 18. More important to notice, however, is the fact that the diary *does* contain these explicit references to meetings of the little society in Frederica (made up almost wholly of the Hird family), both in the first instance and subsequently.

This little group at Frederica, then, was Wesley's first actual implementation of a Methodist society in Georgia. It had a most inauspicious beginning—only one person, young Mark Hird, attended the first meeting. Nevertheless, during the twelve days that John remained at Frederica (on that visit), the group met every day during the week at about 7 or 8 in the evening after Prayers. The diary entry typically notes one member of the group, and then lists some variation of their characteristic activities: "Mark Hird, etc, sang, religious talk," or "Mr. Hird, etc, sang," or "Phoebe Hird, etc., religious talk, sang." The Sunday afternoon meetings, following Evening Prayers [at mid-afternoon], follow a similar pattern of entry, designating a similar format: "4 Mark Hird, etc, religious talk. 5 Tea, religious talk; sang; religious talk."¹⁸

Notice of a second group at Frederica appears in the *Journal* during the following week: "Wed. 16. Another little company of us met: Mr. Reed, Davison, Walker, Delamotte, and myself. We sang, read a little of Mr. Law, and then conversed. Wednesdays and Fridays were the days we fixed for constant meeting."¹⁹ The diary entry again is similar:

2 Mr Reed, Delamotte, and Davison; sang; prayed; [read] Mr Law, *religious talk*; sang. 3 Mr Walker came, religious talk; he went; sang. 3.30.²⁰

¹⁶June 10 and 13, 1736: *ibid.*, 18:393.

¹⁷Mr. Hird did begin coming on Monday, June 13. It is interesting to note that Wesley's published *Journal* accounts for this period, when referring to people, makes specific references to a "Mr." sixteen times more often than to a "Mrs." The diary on the other hand, has nearly two references to a "Mrs." for every reference to a "Mr."

¹⁸*Works*, 18:394-96.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 18:161.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 18:394.

Although this group only met during the middle of the day on the stationary fast days (Wednesdays and Fridays), it is not a *completely* distinct group from the previous one, as can be seen in the attendance at its next (second) meeting on Friday: "2 Mr Davison, Walker, *Mark Hird*; prayed; Law, religious talk; sang." Although they had fixed certain days for "constant meeting," Wesley left Frederica the next week, before a series of constant meetings could take place, and the diary for Tuesday shows that he was perhaps having some trouble with members of the group before his departure: "[June 22] 3.30 Religious talk with Reed. 4 Necessary talk with Davison (gained no ground)." Nevertheless, on Wednesday the 23rd, after evening prayers and just a couple hours before leaving Frederica, he noted their third meeting in his diary: "Mr Hird, etc, sang, religious talk."²¹

Four weeks later (in August), John returned to Frederica, accompanied by Sophy, who became a central referent in the diaries for the meetings of that little society. The meetings on weekday evenings are typically indicated by the entry "Miss Sophy, etc, sang, [read] Law, sang." And on Sundays, we find entries such as "[Aug 15] 5 Mark Hird, Mrs [and] Mr Hird, Mr Trackner, Miss Sophy, Miss Fawset with me; sang; [read] Law; sang (they seemed affected)." The diary indicates that regular meetings were held every evening after Prayers, and there were additional meetings most afternoons.²²

When Wesley left Frederica at the beginning of September, Mr. Reed agreed to read evening prayers in his absence, and "five or six persons agreed to spend an hour together every day in singing, reading, and exhorting one another."²³ This, then, provided for the continuation of the Frederica Methodist society, which at its height a month later, would number nine in attendance.

The Methodist Society at Savannah

The significance of these diary entries at Frederica goes beyond their description of the germinating society there. They also indicate that IF such a group were under Wesley's guidance in Savannah, it would probably show up in his diary with some form of the characteristic entry including the identifying marks: "[name], etc, sang, read, religious talk, sang." However, no such indications of society activity at Savannah involving Wesley appear until September, 1736. His religious counseling during the weeks spent in Savannah during July is primarily in individual ses-

²¹*Ibid.*, 18:396-97.

²²*Ibid.*, 18:408-18.

²³MS Journal, *Works*, 18:418. Wesley "marked Psalms and Hymns" after talking with Reed on August 31, perhaps to provide Reed with appropriate material for his task. Diary, *Works*, 18:417.

sions with Miss Bovey and Miss Sophy, and his evenings are spent almost invariably at the services conducted by the German Moravians.

Only after the August, 1736 visit to Frederica do we find records in Wesley's diary of his participation in such society meetings in Savannah. As might be expected, the typical manner of designating such meetings in the diary was by noting one of the regular participants, followed by "etc," then listing the group's particular activities, usually including prayer, singing, and reading. The names of the persons who first become prominent in these entries should not be surprising—they are the Hows family (Robert Hows, his wife, Anne, and her mother, Margaret Gilbert). These regular participants in the meetings, along with Miss Sophy and Miss Bovey, seem to have been the core of this little Savannah society at this point (at least from Wesley's perspective).²⁴ One of the regular meetings (which might or might not be considered "Methodist") was on Saturday evening, occasions which Wesley begins to note on September 18 simply as "communicants came, began Patrick."²⁵ The communicants continue to meet every Saturday evening, which Wesley notes faithfully in his diary. The entry changes in November, however, to "Miss Sophy, etc, Patrick," and then in December becomes "Mr. Hows, etc, Patrick."

In the long run, it is Mr. Hows—who started the first society under Samuel Quincy—who is most frequently noted by name in Wesley's characteristic diary records of the various Methodist meetings. "Mr. Hows, etc, sang, read, prayed, sang, religious talk, sang" (or some variation on this basic pattern) becomes a familiar entry in the diary by the end of December, 1736, not only on Saturday evenings, but Wednesday evenings and Sunday afternoons as well.

Development of the Methodist Societies

By the end of 1736, then, a pattern had begun to develop, including the regular Sunday afternoon meetings after Evening Prayers, frequent evening meetings during the week (after reading Prayers and expounding), and a Saturday evening meeting especially for preparing communicants. The readings at these sessions included Clement of Rome, Ephraem Syrus, William Law, Edward Young, and Richard Reeves, with Patrick's *Christian Sacrifice* the regular selection for Saturday evening.

Over the months, the groups in Frederica and Savannah included between twenty and thirty persons identifiable by their being mentioned in

²⁴The first recognizable diary notation of such meetings is Sunday, September 12, 1736: "Mrs. Gilbert's, prayed, sang, *Country Parson*." The following Wednesday evening he notes "Mrs Hows, etc, began Clement." Two weeks later, the entry reads, "Mrs Gilbert, etc, Clement, sang." *Works*, 18:422, 425, 428.

²⁵Simon Patrick, *The Christian Sacrifice: A Treatise Shewing the Necessity, End, and Manner of Receiving Holy Communion: Together with Suitable Prayers and Meditations for Every Month in the Year, and the Principal Festivals* (1671).

the diary, including (in addition to those already mentioned) names such as Vanderplank, Campbell, Turner, Robinson, Patterson, Houston, Potter, Calwell, Davison, Fawset, and Walker.

In February, 1737, Wesley wrote a letter to the SPG in London reporting his methods in Georgia, including the following description of these society meetings:

Some time after the Evening Service [on Sunday afternoons], as many of my parishioners as desire it meet at my house (as they do likewise on Wednesday evening) and spend about an hour in prayer, singing, reading a practical book, and mutual exhortation. A smaller number (mostly those who desire to communicate the next day) meet here on Saturday evening; and a few of these come to me on the other evenings, and pass half an hour in the same employments.²⁶

Here is the source in 1737 for Wesley's later recollection that the Georgia society met at his house on Sunday afternoons. This had first started in September and October, 1736, and by February, 1737 such a pattern had become common, as is shown by the regular entries in the diary. The attendance (on Saturday evenings especially) could not have been large, given the fact that the number of communicants (faithfully noted in the diaries) normally ranged between ten and twenty.

These people and developments, at Frederica and Savannah taken together (in that order), do indeed represent "the second rise of Methodism" in Georgia mentioned in the "Short History." The actual conditions and sequence of their development were not fully outlined in Wesley's accounts, but the picture he presented was clear enough to suit his purposes at the time. Not least of the pressures on Wesley in the 1780s when he wrote the "Short History" were the challenges to his authority and the consequent necessity for him to undergird his leadership role by reinforcing his reputation as the primary founder of Methodism.

Wesley's Ministry in Georgia

The progress of the parish work (especially in Savannah) as well as the Methodist society during the last few months of Wesley's stay in Georgia and their continued history under the leadership of George Whitefield is not the major focus of this paper, but a few observations might be warranted.

The twenty or thirty persons who made up the Methodist lists in Savannah and Frederica were only the faithful heart of a larger congregation who participated in the regular services of the parish. The whole parish, containing upwards of five hundred souls, was by Wesley's report over two hundred miles in length and "laughs at the labours of one man."²⁷ His efforts were concentrated in Savannah, where he maintained a rigorous

²⁶February 26, 1737; *Works*, 18:476, cf. 24:495.

²⁷MS Journal, *Works*, 18:420; letter to James Vernon (11 September 1736), *Works*, 24:474.

ecclesiastical discipline. Those who came over with Wesley had some indication during the ocean crossing of what lay ahead — he had read Prayers (and expounded the Scriptures) twice a day on shipboard (to the annoyance of some passengers) and held regular communion services, even baptizing new believers as the occasion arose. In Savannah, he began immediately to hold morning prayers at 7 a.m. every day²⁸ and evening prayers after supper. After a month, the morning prayer service at the courthouse (no church building as yet having been provided, a continuing complaint beyond Wesley's day) was moved back to 6 a.m., Wesley noting in his diary that, on the first occasion, four persons attended. The morning prayer service that Wednesday at 11 (stationary fast day) was attended by thirty persons, as was the case at 2:30 that afternoon (a fact worthy of being listed in Wesley's diary summary for the day under the heading of Providence).²⁹ By the beginning of May, the morning service had been moved back again to 5 a.m., Wesley proudly noting the high attendances at twenty and twenty-five.³⁰

Things did not go quite so well in the smaller and newer town of Frederica. The first Sunday's morning service began with three persons there, but grew to nineteen before they had the benediction. Single digit attendance figures at weekday services (not Methodist) were not uncommon, but Wesley continued undaunted, even noting on Saturday, May 29, that he had read Prayers and expounded, with one person there!³¹ The next day, he carefully lists the early morning prayer service in all its parts and notes the attendance as five, followed by the regular morning prayers and communion service — twenty-five at the prayer service and ten communicated.

These records continue through the Georgia diary. The situation at Frederica eventually deteriorates after Charles leaves for England (the village is left for months without a minister, Wesley's successors not being willing to go there at all!), but the Savannah congregation develops and thrives under Wesley's care. He provides plenty of opportunities for worship: besides three services every Sunday and two every day, there are also special services on saint's days and other special festivals of the church, with prayers, preaching, and communion. The attendance at the daily early morning prayers in September 1736 (when Wesley first became involved with the little society) was about 16-18 on average (actually down a bit from March, but remember that the service was now 5 a.m.!), the evening weekday service ranged from 25-35 (with 70 on one occasion). The

²⁸Except that, for a while, Morning Prayers on Wednesdays and Fridays (stationary fast days) were at 10-11 a.m.

²⁹*Works*, 18:367.

³⁰Moving the morning service to an earlier hour as the days lengthened was an attempt to keep it at sunrise, so as not to interfere with the workday.

³¹*Works*, 18:389. No hint here of the possible inflation of numbers which marks the field preaching two years later at Moorfields and Kensington Green!

Sunday morning prayer service numbered from 25-40 with 10-15 communicants. The largest service was the evensong on Sunday afternoon, which was attended by 40-50 people regularly.

These numbers hold up rather consistently in Savannah throughout the rest of 1736 and into the following year, when they begin *growing*. By the July and August of 1737, the daily 5 a.m. service is usually attracting 25 to 35 people (and at times as many as 40), the weekday evening prayers 30 to 40, the Sunday morning prayers 50 to 60 (with 25 to 27 communicants, the number unaffected in subsequent weeks by his repelling Sophy from the Table on August 7) and the Sunday evensong 55 to 70 (down just a bit from the average of over 70 during Lent, after a high of 100 on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday). All of this is to say that Wesley's oversight of the Savannah parish proceeded with all due diligence and not without a positive response from a significant proportion of the people, far more than just the 20 or 30 "Methodists" who were coming to the extracurricular meetings.

Who were these Methodists? It is not always easy to get a clear, unbiased picture of individual personalities. The divisions and tensions in the colony during that period resulted in certain "parties" being designated, among which the Wesley group (loosely and variously defined) were seen by their opponents as a group of trouble-makers and scoundrels. And Wesley is not the only one to come under public and private attack. It is perhaps no accident that the descriptions we have of some of the early Georgia Methodists, such as Robert Hows, Robert Gilbert, Messrs. Gough, Campbell, etc., like those of Wesley himself, are not the most flattering of portraits. We should remember, of course, that on the one hand the feelings on the different sides of the issues in Georgia were very strong, but on the other hand, the early Methodist movement also tended to attract, among others, a scruffy type of folk, many of whom were from among the disadvantaged, the poor, the disenfranchised, the lost sheep of society. And many if not most of Wesley's Georgia friends were servants, youth, women, and laborers. A few apparently were bonafide scoundrels.

Robert Hows himself (parish clerk and all) was apparently not beyond reproach, as some contemporary documents indicate. Wesley's only reference to Hows in the *Journal* tells of his house burning down and a collection being made for him the following day. Apparently, Wesley appealed to the Trustees and others on Hows' behalf, raising a considerable amount of money to rebuild his house. By means of this show of charity, William Stephens reports, Hows' "gains abundantly overpaid his loss," although he never actually rebuilt his house; from that time he "laid aside all thought of improvement of land, but seemed rather desirous of appearing an adept in the improvement of grace."³² Hows was also accused

³²William Stephens, *Stephens' Journal, 1737-1740*, vol 4 of *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, comp. and pub. by Allen D. Candler (Atlanta: Franklin Printing and

of being a party to the abuse of his children after his wife died (even the death of one aged eight, through neglect)³³ and, after having left the colony once, he tried to get any and all of his previous debts erased before returning with Whitefield in 1739.³⁴

The Gilberts (Robert and Margaret) also continued as Methodists beyond Wesley's time, associating themselves with Whitefield, with whom they left the colony in 1740. Gilbert had given up his position as magistrate for fear of being found out an illiterate (he signed some of the volatile petitions of the day simply with an X).³⁵ Stephens' comment on the Gilberts' departure is nearly predictable, though not necessarily without grounding: "Not that their loss is of any great significance, for he was originally a seller of old cloths in London, here a botching tailor, and no planter, but a sober, quiet man, doing no harm, nor much good."³⁶ Gilbert's finances also seemed to be somewhat suspect to some observers: "If I am rightly informed, he hath formerly received many distinguished marks of favour, very solid ones too, from Mr. Oglethorpe; for he came in a very poor state; but howsoever hard thoughts some folks may have conceived of Georgia, it is plain he has found a place where he could live and make money."³⁷ Stephens' summary of the situation was that "if the Parson [Wesley] had taken a few more [of the malcontents] with him, of such as he then made his companions, provided their creditors did not suffer, the colony would be better without them."³⁸

Publishing, 1906), 4:393. Hows' report to the Earl of Egmont in 1739 makes reference to this situation in an oblique way: "Hows reported . . . (10.) That in the hottest day of summer, white men may work till 10 o'clock in the forenoon, and he himself did so work at sawing for 3 years; nor had he left the Colony but for his indiscretion in working one day in the full heat without any covering on his head, which struck him with a pain he never since could get clear of. That such indiscretions there are common, but if prudently avoided, there would be no occasion to complain of the country's being too hot for the labour of white men." John Percival, Earl of Egmont, *The Journal of the Earl of Egmont*, vol 5. of *Colonial Records of Georgia* (Atlanta: Franklin-Turner, 1908), 179.

³³"This Hows married a daughter of Mr. Gilbert, that died, leaving two children (girls) behind her, whom their grandmother shewed a kind affection for; but their father purposing to go for England (since Mr. Wesley was no more expected, and Mr. Whitefield's return was impatiently waited for), he disposed of his two children (most unnaturally, as I conceive) and against the will of their grandparents, to the family of Moravian Brethren, under a shew of their being brought up in a stricter course of religion, than the Established Church afforded, unless it were more purified; though what kind of religion these Moravians profess, nobody here knows, except themselves: and to make payment for their breeding up these two children, of the age of about seven or eight years, their father contracts for their servitude in all kinds of work implicitly, till their attaining the age of twenty-four, and so leaves them. It pleased God to take away one of them a while since, by sickness; which no great notice was taken of, everybody supposing that due care was taken of her in her illness; tho' now, from what has happened to the other, many suspect otherwise: for upon the grandmother's hearing accidentally of this child's being not well, she went to see her; but was denied that satisfaction, which made her more importunate; and taking one of her neighbours with her, by some means or other they got admittance; when they found the poor child in a most miserable condition, with cruel usage, and uncommon severity; which occasioned this complaint, and the present enquiry into the matter. The child was produced, and upon taking off her cloaths,

Summary Observations

Some final observations on this “second rise” of Methodism might be made on the basis of our investigation of the Wesley diaries and other contemporary documents:

1. Wesley seems to have exaggerated his singular role in the starting of a Methodist society in Savannah. The person to whom some credit must be given for starting a religious society in Georgia is Robert Hows, parish clerk under both Samuel Quincy and John Wesley, who apparently started the group on his own initiative before July, 1735 and seems to have continued as its leader (independent of Wesley, if not Quincy) well after the Wesleys arrived, and even for several weeks after Wesley and Ingham knew of and encouraged the group’s existence. He was one of the most prominent participants of the group after it became “Methodist” under Wesley’s guidance, and apparently was still an active Methodist after John Wesley had returned to England.³⁹

she appeared to be scourged in a most terrible manner, from her neck down to her heels, with stripes laid on by a masculine hand, most piteous to look at, and her flesh torn, after the manner of what a criminal uses to have, at the hands of a common executioner. Three of the Moravians owned it to be of the Brotherhood’s doing, who appeared; that they held a consultation among themselves (which is their ordinary way in most cases) and that this was the result of it; forasmuch as the child had fouled her bed: in consequence of which sentence, she was thus inhumanly mangled; and that too not done by a woman, but a man of a cruel disposition. We sent for a surgeon to give his opinion of it; who said, he could not apprehend any danger from the stripes, farther, than if the anguish should throw her into a fever, he knew not what might happen; and the child appeared very weak, with her arms much emaciated. Upon the whole the magistrates thought that the least they could do was to require good fail for the person’s appearance at the next sessions, who had been the instrument of inflicting such cruelty; and that the other two also should be obliged, on their own recognizances, to appear at the same time. In the meanwhile, the child was delivered to the grandmother, to take care of it, till it should be farther considered at the court. — From such marks of sanctification, *libera nos*: and whether such a father, or such guardians, have the best title to it, is not my task to enquire.” Stephens, *Journal*, 393-95 (August 22, 1739).

³⁴Egmont, *Journal*, 177-78 (June 6, 1739): “Robert Howes [Hows] late Clerk of Savannah church came to me this morning, to desire, that as he goes with Mr. Whitefield to Pennsylvania, Virginia, & Georgia (though not to stay there, he having surrendered his Lot), he might not be troubled at his arrival on the score of any debt he might be found to owe to the Trustees store, with which he cleared Accounts a year ago. That he knows of nothing he owes, but Mr. Causton kept the Account of the stores so ill, that possible the Commissioners may find some debt due, but it cannot be much, and what is he thinks may be forgiven him on the score of his having acted as Parish Clerk several years without pay, and had been often called from his private work to bury the dead, etc. I promised to mention it to the Trustees, and thought his request reasonable.”

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 106; letter from Col. Stephens (31 January 1739), included the comment, “That Mr. [Robert] Gilbert the Tailor, who by Col. Oglethorpe’s recommendation had been appointed 3d Bailiff, scrupled accepting that Office, lest it should expose him, he not knowing how to write or read.” See also Candler, *Colonial Records*, 22:263, for Stephens’ letter.

³⁶Stephens, *Journal*, 645 (August 19, 1740).

2. As in many other instances (including the other two rises of Methodism), John Wesley saw the value of an endeavor begun by *someone else* and decided to incorporate the idea into his own scheme of things. He first *executed* this pattern (begun by Hows in Savannah) under his *own* control in Frederica, building a small society around the core membership of the Hird family. This is then the first regular extra-ecclesiastical religious group to be *organized by Wesley* in Georgia (the Frederica society of Methodists), and rightfully claims the honor of being the first manifestation of “the second rise of Methodism.” Wesley then proceeded to take the Savannah group under his wing in good time, helping it to flourish but also providing his own design for its developing activities.

3. Women played a conspicuous role in both the Frederica society and in the subsequent developments of the Savannah society. Sophy Hopkey was not least among the members of these groups, although continuing frequent mention is also made of Mrs. Gilbert, Mrs. Burnside (Miss Bovey), Mrs. Vanderplank, Mrs. Hows, and Mrs. Hird, as well as Miss Fawset, Miss Hassel, and Miss Hird. For some reason, however, Wesley was hesitant to mention women as prominently in his published accounts of Georgia as in his private diaries. Whereas in the published *Journal*, references to men predominate by about 10 to 1, in the diary the references to women predominate about 4 to 1. In some instances, the published account actually alters a reference from the diary (presuming that the diary note is correct) to indicate that a man was involved in an event when it was apparently a woman.

4. The description of the rise of Methodism contained in Wesley's published *Journal* account is not necessarily incorrect, but so phrased as to be misleading. The *Journal* description of the decisions in April indicate that “we” (Wesley and Ingham? and Quincy? and others?) agreed (1) “to *advise*” some serious folks (who had already decided to do such) “to form *themselves*” into a society (which had already been done, according to Ingham) and “to *meet twice* a week” (which Ingham notes they were already doing, plus once on Sunday; and (2) to select out a smaller number to be helped by “conversing singly with each” (not a meeting as attempt involved only one person, successive attempts in the following days resulted in the formation of a regular group).

5. The description of the “second rise” in the “Short History” is also not necessarily incorrect, but is misleading because of the way it has telescoped all these developments into one sentence: “The second [rise] was in Savannah in April 1736” (true in a sense: the period when Wesley

³⁷*Ibid.*, 645.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 46. See also Charles Delamotte's comments about Mr. Campbell being accused of committing adultery with Mrs. Mears (letter to Wesley, February 23, 1738), *Works*, 24:530.

³⁹Hows also became closely related to Whitefield's work; see Egmont, *Journal*, 174, 178.

was introduced to the presence of such a group and agreed with the plan), “when twenty or thirty persons” (the number who came to be associated with the Wesleyan societies over the months he was there) “met at my house” (which they eventually did, though apparently not until the fall of 1736 and then not exclusively at his house).

6. Evaluations of Wesley’s Georgia ministry as a frustrating failure (or some variation of negative phrasing) overlooks the fact that his records of attendance at Communion and Prayers, through August of 1737, indicate an increase at Matins from about 30 to almost 60, an increase at weekday evening prayers from about 25 to about 45, a corresponding steady increase at early morning prayers from a dozen to a fairly regular two dozen, and a rather healthy increase in Sunday evensong to a regular attendance of 50 to 75 in the late summer of 1737. His own disappointment, of course, is clearly seen in regard to his ministry to the Indians, his relationship to Sophy Hopkey, and his own spiritual pilgrimage, but should not be confused with the relative success that he experienced during much of his ministry to his parish.

Like many other accounts of origins, Wesley’s description of these events as told in his later recollections is expressed in a fashion clearly defined in the light of the intervening developments. We should be wary of reading Wesley (as also most other first-hand accounts) for details as though written by a careful modern historian. The eighteenth-century authors’ purposes often were quite apart from a concern to provide us with accurate details (their eye toward future generations was perhaps concerned about a different sort of evaluation or judgment than the question of accuracy of detail). Wesley was above all describing his role as an instrument of God’s providence. However, he has provided in his diaries one of the best resources for us to fill in many of the details upon which a revised account can be based. I would hope that historians, theologians, and biographers will find these diary materials worth the time and effort to examine carefully and critically as crucial evidence for understanding God’s work in and through the history of the people called Methodists.