

## **A MISSIONARY/PREACHER AS AMERICA MOVED WEST: THE MINISTRY OF JOHN WESLEY OSBORNE**

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Religion in the nineteenth century played a significant role as America moved west; preachers, missionaries, churches, and organizations such as tract and Bible societies left their mark on the character of the country. Even the ministry of an ordinary preacher like John Wesley Osborne had some impact, and in order to understand the work of organized Christianity on the American frontier one needs to study the career of the average missionary/preacher, as well as the contributions of religious leaders. Osborne began his work in the 1830's in the Appalachian mountains of Virginia where petty conflicts with fellow clergy and church discipline, not unusual in the Methodist itineracy, caused him to depart from the Methodist church that had been his heritage. His efforts then turned to taking Christianity to settlements growing up along the developing railway lines in Illinois, first through a non-pastoral ministry in the American Tract Society, followed by missionary work among Episcopal congregations struggling with inadequate support by their denomination. His varied ministry included ordination as a clergyman in both the Methodist and Episcopal churches and encompassed forty years of the mid-nineteenth century. The efforts of unknown ministers like John Wesley Osborne whose zeal for spreading the gospel enabled them to face innumerable hardships and frustrations were essential to the spread of the faith, and an examination of an individual ministerial career can aid in better understanding the part that religion played in the westward movement.

In the early spring of 1784, the year of the Christmas Conference which marked the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, a family with the name of Osborne left Wood End near Sheffield, England, settled in Baltimore, and became a part of the Lovely Lane Methodist Society there. The Osbornes had been scythe makers in England, selling their products primarily in colonial America, and it seemed a logical move to go to America to make the scythes. The Americans, however, wanted English products, and the venture failed. Some of the family remained in Baltimore, including Joseph Osborne who apprenticed in the carpentry trade.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Osborne was born in Wood End, Sheffield, England, March 21, 1768.

The year before the Osbornes arrived in Baltimore, Thomas Burke, a British sergeant who had served under Lord Cornwallis, settled in Baltimore. After the defeat at Yorktown, his family had been held in the barracks at Fredericktown, Maryland, until the peace treaty of 1783. Then the Burkes, too, became members of the Lovely Lane Society where their daughter Elizabeth led the choir for many years after the society built the Light Street Church in 1786.<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth had been an eleven-year-old girl when she, along with her mother and two brothers, hid in cellars during the bombardment of Yorktown in 1781, after a storm prevented them from escaping by boat to Gloucester on the other side of the York River.<sup>3</sup>

On August 14, 1794, Elizabeth Burke married Joseph Osborne, and they lived in a house on Eutaw Street where Joseph pursued the carpentry trade. Their eldest son recalled hearing his mother tell about early Methodism in Baltimore when they were members of the Light Street Church and about "being mobbed at their meeting house by a party of sailors and rowdies who broke up their benches and otherwise maltreated them" at a time when the Methodists in Baltimore "were poor and despised."<sup>4</sup> Although life held little in the way of material goods for this Methodist family, the Osbornes' spiritual life must have been rich. They were at the spot most significant in the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, the hub of the Baltimore Conference, where many of the early General Conferences were held. No doubt they saw and heard Bishop Asbury, who often preached at the Light Street Church, and they probably knew many of the early Methodist leaders. When their youngest son was born on November 18, 1806, Joseph and Elizabeth appropriately named him John Wesley.<sup>5</sup>

John Wesley Osborne learned carpentry from his father, but a stronger calling led him into the Methodist ministry in 1830 when he was twenty-four years old.<sup>6</sup> He received recommendations from two circuits, Severn and Carlisle, before being admitted to the Baltimore Conference on trial in 1833.<sup>7</sup> It is not clear why he was denied admission on trial in 1832 when he first was recommended. However, licentiates in 1832 were

<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth Burke was born in Belfast, Ireland, in 1770.

<sup>3</sup>Account written in 1850 by Joseph Osborne, eldest son of Joseph and Elizabeth (Burke) Osborne, copy owned by Betty Young.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>The first four daughters of Elizabeth and Joseph died in infancy before 1800, possibly from Yellow Fever which was epidemic in Baltimore during the late 1700's. In addition to John Wesley, their youngest child, they had a son Joseph and two more daughters.

<sup>6</sup>Inscription in the pocket Bible carried by John Wesley Osborne during his circuit-riding ministry which says that he purchased the Bible in 1830, the year he entered the ministry. The Bible is owned by Betty Young.

<sup>7</sup>January 28, 1832, by the Severn Circuit, record no. 571; December 29, 1832, by the Carlisle Circuit, record no. 583; Methodist Historical Society of the Baltimore Annual Conference, Lovely Lane Museum, Baltimore. See also, Baltimore Conference Journal, April 3, 1833, p. 383, manuscript in Lovely Lane Museum.

required to study a selection of books and answer questions on various subjects set forth by a committee appointed by Bishop Hedding before they were admitted to membership in the conference, and perhaps he failed that year in the examination.<sup>8</sup> It is intriguing to consider what education Osborne might have had prior to becoming a minister. Although Methodists at this time did not consider formal theological education necessary for the ministry, education in general was encouraged. A report at the General Conference of 1828 stated that "We do not profess to educate young men and train them up for the ministry; but . . . as our ministers are raised up mostly from among ourselves, their literary character will vary according to the general character of the church."<sup>9</sup> It is very likely that Osborne attended the Asbury Sunday School founded by the Light Street Church in 1816 when he was ten years old, and with the other scholars he would have filed from the school on Courtland Street to attend Sunday services at Light Street, or even the new church on Eutaw Street where the Osbornes lived.<sup>10</sup>

Evidence indicates that Osborne also received some college education. Cokesbury College, the Methodists' first attempt at higher education, was approved at the Christmas Conference in 1784 and for a time was located on Light Street in Baltimore. However, it had experienced two disastrous fires and gone out of existence before he was born in 1806. In the 1820's the Baltimore Conference began to think seriously again about supporting an institution of higher education, and in 1833, the year that John Wesley Osborne was received into the Conference, they began negotiations to take over Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Dickinson, a non-denominational school dedicated to liberal studies, had been "languishing" and needed the support that the Methodists were eager to give.<sup>11</sup> Two references raise the possibility that Osborne may have attended Dickinson—he was recommended to the Baltimore Conference by the Carlisle Circuit in 1832, and a John W. Osborne is listed in the Dickinson class of 1842 which graduated during the conference year (1841/42) when the Rev. John W. Osborne was recorded as "superannuated" and held no appointment.<sup>12</sup> His few extant writings show a style indicative of an educational background superior to many preachers at that time.

<sup>8</sup>Baltimore Conference Journal, March 14, 1832, p. 354; March 26, 1832, p. 368, manuscripts in Lovely Lane Museum. The General Conference of 1816 had recommended a course of study to prepare ministerial candidates for examination, and the Baltimore Conference in 1817 was the first to adopt that recommendation; Methodist Episcopal Church, *Journal of Annual Conference 1817*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>9</sup>Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857), p. 5.

<sup>10</sup>*Baltimore City Directories*; Gordon Pratt Baker, ed., *Those Incredible Methodists* (Baltimore: Commission on Archives and History, 1972), pp. 123-125.

<sup>11</sup>A. W. Cummings, *The Early Schools of Methodism* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1886), p. 192; Baltimore Conference Journal, Tuesday, April 2, 1833, p. 382, manuscript in the Lovely Lane Museum.

<sup>12</sup>Record no. 583, Lovely Lane Museum; *Dickinson College Alumni Record*, 1905.

The appointment given to Osborne the year of his admittance into the Baltimore Conference on trial was to St. Mary's in the Baltimore District, a circuit along the Chesapeake Bay southeast of Washington, D.C. The "numbers in Society" in that circuit were "268 white and 409 colored," and the circuit adjoined an area designated at the same 1833 conference as a place that would benefit from a missionary. Even though missionaries were employed only for a few places within the bounds of the Baltimore Conference,<sup>13</sup> Osborne's pastoral work accomplished that end by increasing the membership at St. Mary's that year to "305 white and 465 colored."<sup>14</sup>

At the 1834 conference held in Alexandria, Osborne was continued on trial and assigned to the Bloomfield circuit in the mountains of central Pennsylvania with a totally white membership of 367.<sup>15</sup> Following the typical pattern of the itinerant ministry, he was moved again after one year to the Covington circuit in the rugged and sparsely-populated mountains of the Rockingham District, along what is now the border area between Virginia and West Virginia. He remained in this district for six years, although his circuit assignments changed.<sup>16</sup>

In 1835 John Wesley Osborne was duly examined by his peers over the course of study recommended by Bishop John Emory and appointed to the Monroe circuit. The following year, 1836, he was appointed to the Christiansburg circuit, and at the annual conference that year was elevated to Deacon's orders.<sup>17</sup> However, the year around Christiansburg marked the beginning of troubles with Methodist discipline after his marriage to a sixteen-year-old girl, Rachel Grigsby Hamilton, who was the daughter of a Virginia planter. They were married on August 4, 1836, at Mt. Pleasant Methodist Episcopal Church in Rockbridge County, Virginia, by the Rev. Jacob Lanius.<sup>18</sup>

Marriage made the hard life of a circuit rider in the mountainous frontier even more difficult because of the responsibilities of supporting a wife and family. Bishop Francis Asbury once commented that although marriage is honorable, "to me it is a ceremony awful as death. . . . I calculate

<sup>13</sup>Baltimore Conference Journal, April 3-5, 1833, pp. 383-385, manuscript in the Lovely Lane Museum. The 1833 conference met in Baltimore.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, March 22, 1834.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, March 12, 1834.

<sup>16</sup>See listings of appointments in the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Journal of Annual Conferences 1835-1840* for the Baltimore Conference.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, March 14, 1835, pp. 7, 43; March 11, 1836, p. 54. The course of study recommended for ministers on trial included among other items the Bible, Wesley's sermons, and the *Methodist Discipline*.

<sup>18</sup>*The Baltimore American*, August 16, 1836; family Bible of John Wesley Osborne, owned by William H. Osborne of Houston, Texas. John Hamilton, Rachel's father, owned an estate near Lexington, Virginia, where he farmed and carried on a shipping business on the James River; *John Hamilton of "Locust Hill"* (Lexington, Virginia: privately printed, 1933), pp. 1-2.

we have lost the travelling labours of two hundred of the best men in America . . . by marriage and consequent location.”<sup>19</sup> Asbury was pleased in 1809 at the Virginia Conference to find that of the eighty-four preachers only three were married.<sup>20</sup> The salary of a married itinerant when Osborne married was two hundred dollars a year plus travelling expenses. Some church members objected to married ministers because that expected salary was double the amount for a single man.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the handicaps of being married and having only a meager allowance, Osborne, like other ministers in the Methodist itineracy, never knew where he would be sent the next year. He definitely would be moved at least every two years, more likely every year. Conditions for travelling, even on horseback, in the Appalachian mountains were difficult, and his societies were spread over large areas.

The lack of adequate family income and his own independent spirit were two of the factors that led to problems for John Wesley Osborne in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Also, his marriage undoubtedly was a source of trouble because the laity was reluctant to pay extra for a married minister and because of jealousy on the part of the clergy who saw him as “marrying into money,” even though the wealth of Rachel’s family was not available to him. These aggravations were first brought into the open at the March 1837 annual conference when Osborne was charged with “prevarication” and “mal-administration,” based on testimonies by society members at his Quarterly Meeting in Blacksburg the previous December.<sup>22</sup> One testimonial certified that Osborne had dismissed Elizabeth Amiss from Class Meeting for non-attendance without previously notifying her as required in the Discipline.<sup>23</sup> Another charge stated that he had lied in denying that he had called John Deyerle, one of the stewards, a “brute.” Osborne earlier had complained about receiving only \$40 during the conference year which meant that he would have to take his wife back to her father near Lexington; Deyerle said that she could ride there by horseback in “a day and a half,” a statement to which Osborne allegedly responded by calling Deyerle a brute.<sup>24</sup> The distance from Blacksburg to her father’s house was about eighty miles, and the sixteen-year-old Mrs. Osborne was at that time pregnant with her first child. The case came

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<sup>19</sup>*The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, Vol. II (London and Nashville: Epworth and Abingdon Press, 1958), p. 474.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 591.

<sup>21</sup>*The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: The Methodist Episcopal Church, 1836), p. 165; Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), p. 21.

<sup>22</sup>Baltimore Conference Journal, March 10-11, 1837, pp. 78-79, manuscript in Lovely Lane Museum.

<sup>23</sup>Folder on J. W. Osborne, Case 1837, Archives of the Methodist Historical Society of the Baltimore Annual Conference, Lovely Lane Museum.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, such charges come under “Immoral Ministers” in the 1836 *Discipline*.

before the Annual Conference where Osborne was “admonished” by Bishop Waugh according to a resolution passed by the conference. He was then duly elected to Elder’s orders.<sup>25</sup>

Trials of Elders in the travelling ministry were not uncommon in the nineteenth century. The Baltimore Conference Journals are full of charges brought against many different preachers, and each Annual Conference spent a considerable amount of time in the “examination of the character of Elders.” Usually, the examination was a routine exercise with no charges brought forward, as was the case with Osborne at many Annual Conferences. When charges were preferred against a minister, a committee studied the case and made a report back to the Conference. Peers discussed the reports and made recommendations to the presiding bishop. When a charge was considered serious, the Conference would conduct a trial.<sup>26</sup> Following this procedure, charges against Osborne were considered by the Baltimore Conference four times during his fifteen years as a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

After Osborne’s return to the Rockingham District—1838 to the Lewisburg circuit and the following two years to the Huntersville circuit—he had no confrontations with the church. At the 1841 conference held at Monument Street Church in Baltimore, Osborne requested a superannuated relation.<sup>28</sup> The following year he was examined, assigned an “effective relation,” and appointed to the Fairfax circuit in the Potomac District.<sup>29</sup> In 1843, a few days after the birth of his eldest son, Osborne went from his district to the Annual Conference at Wesley Chapel in Baltimore again to face charges, this time for falsehood and dishonesty. The case was brought to the Conference by the Presiding Elder of the Potomac District, the Reverend Edwin Dorsey, at the request of the stewards of Osborne’s circuit. After examining the evidence, the committee assigned to the case at the Conference presented a report supporting a resolution to refer the case back to the district for trial. In the mean-

<sup>25</sup>Baltimore Conference Journal, March 11, 1837, p. 79, manuscript in Lovely Lane Museum.

<sup>26</sup>See the Baltimore Conference Journals 1830’s and 1840’s, manuscripts in Lovely Lane Museum. See also *The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (New York, 1848), pp. 84-86 “Of the Method of proceeding against Accused Traveling Ministers or Preachers.”

<sup>27</sup>Two daughters, Georgiana and Mary, were born to the Osbornes during those conference years, and their first daughter, Elizabeth, died at the age of one year. Osborne later wrote that in 1840, while they were visiting in Baltimore, his daughter Georgiana was christened and that the children who attended the event called her “the little girl from the mountains.” Letter of John Wesley Osborne to his son, Reverend Frank Osborne, April 9, 1878, owned by Betty Young.

<sup>28</sup>Baltimore Conference Journal, February 17, 1841, p. 164, manuscript in Lovely Lane Museum. The term “superannuated” was defined in 1881 as Methodist ministers who through infirmity or affliction were not given appointments but had all rights and privileges of the Annual Conference; *Cyclopedia of Methodism* (Philadelphia, 1881).

<sup>29</sup>Baltimore Conference Journal, March 18, 1842, p. 178, manuscript in Lovely Lane Museum.

time, the conference committee recommended that Osborne be given a different circuit for his 1843 appointment. The bishop acted on this recommendation and appointed him to South Branch circuit in the Winchester District where he remained for two years.<sup>30</sup>

The voluminous file of evidence in the Fairfax circuit case does not clearly explain the root of the problem. The line seems to be drawn between parishoners who supported Osborne and some of the stewards who along with Wesley Rohr, the assistant minister, charged him with recording money given for "quarterage" as "table money."<sup>31</sup> Rohr also testified that Osborne had asked him to request table expenses around the circuit because so little had been given to him for support of his family, when in fact he had received more than he reported. However, many parishoners testified that the money they had given for table expenses was designated as such at their own request.

As preparation for the trial, numerous church members signed statements pertaining to Osborne's ministry. They found him "a man of piety and vital religion and able to direct men's minds heavenward" and "a perfect gentleman" whose "deportment is always Christian." The view of Osborne as a "gentleman" may indicate that education and family connections had made him a cut above the average circuit rider and be a key to jealousy that resulted in charges against him. Another written testimony in his behalf states that "his zealous and untiring efforts to promote the interests of Christianity has elicited the warmest admiration of all who know him, and his deep and fervent piety has left an impression in the minds of the people of this neighborhood that *time*, with all his potency, will not soon remove."<sup>32</sup>

Although N. Conrad, a steward of the circuit and the person who led the opposition against Osborne, did acknowledge that Brother Osborne deserved credit for his "faithful efforts during the year," especially for "assisting us to get our parsonage up," and that "as to his preaching there can be no objection to him," he gave extensive evidence to support the claim that Osborne was unable, or at least did not, keep accurate records of his collections and expenses. In addition, Brother Rohr accused Osborne of keeping some of the receipts and not reporting them at all. Also, he

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<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, March 24, 1843, pp. 235-236.

<sup>31</sup>Nolan B. Harmon in his *Encyclopedia of World Methodism* defines "quarterage" as collections made in preparation for quarterly meetings and paid to preachers at the meetings; although the term is not used in the *Discipline* after 1796, the custom continued as long as Presiding Elders were required to hold quarterly conferences and the amount raised was divided according to a percentage ratio between the Presiding Elder and the preacher in charge of the circuit. "Table money" was given to the preachers for family living; no statement was found about requirements for reporting such gifts.

<sup>32</sup>Folder of testimonies in the 1843 trial of Reverend John Wesley Osborne, Lovely Lane Museum, Baltimore.

accused his superior of failing to repay him for \$85 worth of books even after Osborne's father-in-law had given Osborne money to help with the payment. The repayment eventually was made with an apology by Osborne that the money could not be spared earlier. In this connection there were two testimonies from neighbors of the Osbornes certifying that the family had often been without wood, meal, flour, and other provisions during the year. To counteract the charge that Osborne had failed to show up for a service, a parishoner certified that Mrs. Osborne had been confined in childbirth the previous Wednesday and on Sunday was so seriously indisposed "as to justify Brother Osborne in neglecting other business to attend to her." Another issue in the 1843 Fairfax circuit trial concerned whether Osborne would be returned to Fairfax for another year. Although he had assured the stewards that he would go elsewhere, he allegedly told two of the congregations on his circuit that he would be seeing them in about six weeks — after conference. In one of Steward Conrad's letters he requested that neither Brother Rohr nor Brother Osborne be returned to Fairfax and added that "great efforts are now being made in order to gain the ascendancy," indicating that a struggle for position was going on between the two ministers.<sup>33</sup>

Even with the extensive manuscript material containing testimonies and letters relevant to this trial in 1843, it is not clear exactly why charges were brought against Osborne and whether they were justified. His married status and the wealth and position of his father-in-law certainly were at play in the situation. What is clear from the evidence is that Osborne was a very independent man who resented being pushed around and that he did not keep as accurate records of collections as Methodist discipline required. Perhaps even more important from the historical perspective are the descriptions of the hardships suffered by the family of a married preacher in the travelling ministry as shown from the testimonies and the petty rivalry among the clergy. After a lengthy trial, the committee of ministers who judged the case came to a unanimous opinion that there was not sufficient evidence to prove the Reverend John Wesley Osborne guilty of dishonesty or falsehood.<sup>34</sup> At the next Baltimore Annual Conference, held in Washington in March 1844, the Presiding Elder of the Potomac District during the trial, the Reverend Thomas B. Sargent, closed the incident with that report to the conference.<sup>35</sup>

The two years spent on the South Branch circuit appear to have brought no problems for Osborne. But, at the Conference of 1845, he was assigned to the Alleghany circuit in the Huntingdon District where once again he clashed with a fellow minister. This time his adversary was

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<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>Baltimore Conference Journal, March 21, 1844, p. 273, manuscript in Lovely Lane Museum.

the Reverend John A. Henning, later described as "a man of talent, but eccentric."<sup>36</sup> During the conference, when the name of John Wesley Osborne came up in the examination of Elders, Henning submitted a paper, signed by himself and the Reverend Peter McEnally, charging Osborne with "high misdemeanour in office, mal-administration, and falsehood." The charge was read and tabled.<sup>37</sup> A few days later, at the session where Henning's name was called for examination, Osborne in turn presented charges against Henning for "slander, mal-administration, and falsehood."<sup>38</sup> This 1846 meeting was the first of the Baltimore Conference after the Methodist Episcopal Church, South organized at Louisville in 1845, and, although problems connected with the division within the Methodist church was the primary focus of the conference, it is recorded also that "much time was consumed in the trials of John A. Henning and John Wesley Osborne."<sup>39</sup> The central issues in these trials concern events at camp meetings, a type of religious expression which had become very much a Methodist phenomenon on the frontier by this time. Camp meetings began around 1800 as cooperative ventures among several denominations, but the Methodists continued these outdoor revivals longer than the others, even though the meetings never were officially sanctioned by the Methodist church.<sup>40</sup>

The Baltimore Conference of 1846 took up the trial of Henning first. Osborne had accused him of mal-administration for refusing to give communion to a church member kneeling at the altar, and for withholding membership from an acceptable member.<sup>41</sup> Henning obviously was more meticulous in enforcing moral discipline than Osborne. The same year, in reporting about a revival, Henning wrote that it is every pastor's duty to see that "every evil person be put away from among the flock of Christ,"<sup>42</sup> and, in the conference trial of Osborne, Henning accused his colleague of reinstating church members who had been previously expelled by other ministers. One of those reinstated was a girl who had attended a quilting party where other young people had danced and had, therefore, been dismissed from the church by Osborne's other accuser, Peter McEnally.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>36</sup>James Edward Armstrong, *History of the Old Baltimore Conference* (Baltimore, 1907), p. 494.

<sup>37</sup>Baltimore Conference Journal, March 13, 1846, p. 362, manuscript in Lovely Lane Museum.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, March 19, 1846, p. 376.

<sup>39</sup>Armstrong, p. 281. Because Baltimore was named a "border Conference" by the General Conference in 1844 in the separation resolution which permitted division of the church over the slavery issue, struggles became prevalent between churches and among church members over whether to be a part of the southern church or the northern church. The issue of church division, however, does not seem to be involved in the quarrels between Osborne and Henning.

<sup>40</sup>Johnson, pp. 41-82.

<sup>41</sup>Folder of testimonies in the 1846 trials of John Wesley Osborne and John A. Henning, Lovely Lane Museum, Baltimore.

<sup>42</sup>*Christian Advocate and Journal* (New York), February 11, 1846.

The charges of slander and falsehood brought against Henning were for stating that John Wesley Osborne was not of good standing in the Baltimore Conference, for saying that one of the tents at the August camp meeting at Evans Creek was a tent of "ill-fame," and for other allegedly false declarations about that camp meeting. The result of Henning's trial was that Bishop Elijah Hedding carried out the decision of the conference members that Reverend Henning should be reprimanded for his actions.<sup>44</sup>

The trial of Osborne occupied the delegates for several days of the conference. The conference journal records that so immense was the mass of documents referring to this trial that they would not be put into the journal but placed in the "conference trunk."<sup>45</sup> The documents include both testimonies in support of Henning's charges and in defense of Osborne, many attesting to the high quality and order of the camp meetings with one adding "except the confusion raised by Rev. J. A. Henning."<sup>46</sup> The two camp meetings in question were held in August 1845 in the Huntingdon District located in the mountains along the Pennsylvania/Maryland border. Leaders for the meetings were the Reverend John W. Osborne of the Alleghany circuit, the Reverend John A. Henning from the Cumberland circuit, and the Reverend Peter McEnally from the Frostberg circuit just west of Cumberland, Maryland. In addition to the accusation against Osborne for allegedly allowing a "tent of ill-fame" to remain in the camp circle, Henning also charged that Osborne permitted the sale of items on the Sabbath and said that a "chandelier" added to the cost of the meeting at Simons' campground. Osborne's defense claimed that a steward had investigated the tent at his instruction and found nothing wrong, and that the woman to whom it belonged cried when he finally made her leave because she had come hoping that her daughters would be "saved." Arguments in Osborne's behalf regarding the sales on the Sabbath identified the items as necessary food and supplies including only "small beer." The expense for the "chandelier," according to Osborne, was because it required the burning of more lights; the item itself had been donated, but an extra collection taken up by Osborne purported to be for the extra expense of supplying the "chandelier."<sup>47</sup> Testimonies by supporters of Osborne record that the camp meeting at Rocky Ford was "greatly blessed of the Most High God in the conversion of souls, in building up the membership of the Church, and in giving weight and influence to our beloved Methodism in this part of the circuit." The meeting at Simons'

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<sup>43</sup>Folder of testimonies in the 1846 trials.

<sup>44</sup>Baltimore Conference Journal, March 20, 1846, p. 377, manuscript in Lovely Lane Museum.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, March 26, 1846, p. 392. Methodist conferences usually kept records in trunks that resided with the current bishops and were brought to annual conferences.

<sup>46</sup>Folder of testimonies in the 1846 trials.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*

campground was characterized as "one of the most orderly, respectable, and interesting that has ever been held in our circuit."<sup>48</sup>

The evidence on each side in this trial exemplifies the paradox that had become prevalent in camp meetings. On the one hand, camp meetings were a means of spreading the gospel to people on the frontier and increasing the membership in the Methodist church. On the other hand, abuses were becoming widespread. Writings against camp meetings described them as "country retreats for social intercourse," attractive places for merchants to sell their wares, and havens of increasing immorality.<sup>49</sup> The Conference of 1846 voted separately on each charge against Osborne. No charge was sustained, and the defendant was acquitted.<sup>50</sup> Rigid Methodist discipline which left no room for ministers with more liberal philosophies and which encouraged ministers to keep each other in line was in part responsible for the many charges against ministers in nineteenth century American Methodism. The "examination of Elders" at each Annual Conference encouraged the bringing of charges, and the *Discipline* even instructed preachers to see that other preachers "behave well."<sup>51</sup> Although he was cleared of any wrongdoing in the 1846 trial, Osborne certainly had begun to feel uncomfortable trying to carry out his missionary commitment within the constraints of the Methodist Episcopal Church. However, before severing his relationship with the Methodists, he was involved in one more trial.

In 1847 Osborne returned to the Franklin circuit in the Winchester District for a second year only to run into difficulties with one of the stewards who had requested that he not be returned. The extant evidence indicates that the confrontation began at a Quarterly Conference in May 1847, soon after Osborne was returned to the circuit, when the Presiding Elder asked Osborne if he had any complaints. He replied that the steward, Thomas Jones, had done nothing to fulfill his job in the way of making collections for the minister or providing the elements for communion. Jones reacted to this response by asking the Presiding Elder how to prefer

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<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.* Some of the testimonies supporting Osborne are illustrative of how camp meetings were conducted at that time. They give details of the regulations he had set forth at the beginning of the camp meeting, such as: there should be family prayer in each tent morning and evening and public prayer at eight o'clock in the morning; preaching would be at eleven and three o'clock and again each evening when the trumpet would sound from the stand; the seats in the left of the stand were for ladies and those on the right for gentlemen; the woods on the right and in front of the stand were for "walks" of the gentlemen, and those on the left and rear of the stand were for the ladies; and that no person would be permitted to remain in the tents during public worship at the stand unless they were sick. *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup>*Christian Advocate and Journal* (New York), July 22, 1846; Johnson, pp. 208-228; Lorin Harris Soderwall, "The Rhetoric of the Methodist Camp Meeting," doctoral dissertation, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, June 1971, pp. 89-90.

<sup>50</sup>Baltimore Conference Journal, March 26, 1846, p. 392, manuscript in Lovely Lane Museum.

<sup>51</sup>*The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, 1836, p. 40; 1848, p. 51.

charges against a travelling minister. Steward Jones did, indeed, pursue the matter, and, along with his friend the Reverend Thomas Monroe, sent charges against Osborne to the 1848 Baltimore Annual Conference. A contemporary account by a Methodist preacher in New England gives an interesting and clear picture of the importance of stewards in the Methodist system and of their responsibilities. Stewards were supposed to "look after the wants of the preacher, and take all proper means to supply them" in order that the itinerant preacher would have a respectable living and time for his ministerial duties. Stewards were to be "men of solid piety, who both know and love the Methodist doctrine and discipline," and they should "act from principle" rather than how they feel about the preacher. The writer of this account further observes that stewards are prone to neglect their duties and to make the preachers' work difficult.<sup>52</sup>

When Osborne's name was called in the examination of Elders in 1848, the Presiding Elder brought forth the charges from Steward Jones and the Reverend Monroe, assistant minister on Osborne's circuit, accusing Osborne of "gross immorality" and "falsehood." Supporting evidence indicated that Osborne had repeatedly exaggerated his claims about having no money to pay debts when his wife did have \$60. Also, he was charged with falsely saying that Jones had used "indelicate and unbecoming language" relative to Osborne's wife in public congregation, that he had falsely accused Jones of not fulfilling his stewardship duties in order to get him removed as steward, and that he had not met a preaching engagement "when it was perfectly convenient to do so."<sup>53</sup> Piles of written testimonies supported Osborne's defense in the case, from evidence that indicated Jones and Monroe had built the case to oust Osborne so that Monroe could "wear the Big Hat," to justifications for missing the preaching appointment on the grounds that Osborne had ridden twenty miles over rough terrain the previous day for a service and was too sick to go on to the next engagement. The charge of gross immorality was not sustained in the trial, but Osborne was convicted on the charges of falsehood and "deprived of his ministerial relation to the Church."<sup>54</sup> Two months after being dismissed from the Baltimore Annual Conference, Osborne went to the General Conference in Pittsburgh to appeal the decision. For various periods of time each day for nine days, the delegates heard testimony and discussed the Osborne case. Finally, on May 18, 1848, the General Conference reversed the action of the Baltimore Annual Conference.<sup>55</sup> The following spring, the Baltimore Conference which met in

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<sup>52</sup>James Porter, *The True Evangelist* (Boston: Waite, Peirce & Co., 1847), pp. 142-153; *The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, 1848, pp. 169-170.

<sup>53</sup>Baltimore Conference Journal, March 17, 1848, pp. 71-81; folder of testimonies in the 1848 trial of Reverend John Wesley Osborne, Lovely Lane Museum.

<sup>54</sup>Baltimore Conference Journal, March 21, 1848, p. 82; March 22, 1848, p. 84; folder of testimonies in the 1848 trial, Lovely Lane Museum; Armstrong, p. 292.

<sup>55</sup>Methodist Episcopal Church, *General Conference Report 1848*, pp. 35, 42, 52-53, 57.

Staunton, Virginia, was obliged to reinstate Osborne, after which he requested a "local relation."<sup>56</sup>

After leaving the Methodist ministry, Osborne did not give up his commitment as a missionary of the gospel on the American frontier. He turned, instead, to one of the avenues of non-pastoral ministry which had just opened up to clergymen—being a colporteur for the American Tract Society. A Methodist itinerant minister like John Wesley Osborne would have been very familiar with colporteur work because, "after preaching time was over, they [the circuit riders] opened their saddlebags and assumed the role of book salesmen."<sup>57</sup> Ministers of the Baltimore Conference were especially charged with seeking out those families destitute of Bibles, and many travelling preachers of that conference also served as agents of Tract and Bible societies.<sup>58</sup> In 1847 the major Methodist newspaper carried an article which suggested that because colporteurage was becoming such an important enterprise in America the Methodists should have their own special colporteurs, rather than having the regular ministers distribute religious material.<sup>59</sup> It was logical, then, for a former travelling preacher to become a colporteur as Osborne did in 1851. Also, Osborne may have been influenced in his move to the American Tract Society by his father-in-law, John Hamilton, who had a strong interest in the distribution of Bibles and actively worked in the Bible Society.<sup>60</sup>

The colporteur program of the American Tract Society began in the summer of 1841 and was modeled on a French plan of colportage under which missionaries traveled about France distributing Protestant tracts and promoting personal evangelism.<sup>61</sup> Under the program of the American Tract Society the colporteur's primary purpose was "the sale of the Society's books, not for the Society's sake, but for the good of souls."<sup>62</sup> However, they also served as preachers, organized Sunday Schools, set up lending libraries, performed marriages, and served in various missionary functions. Their work was particularly important in taking the Christian faith to isolated settlements on the frontier.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>56</sup>Baltimore Conference Journal, March 14, 1849, p. 123, manuscript in Lovely Lane Museum. "Local relation" meant formal cessation from the travelling ministry and was granted by a vote of the Annual Conference at a minister's request. The request had to be approved if the minister was in good standing. The minister no longer received an appointment by the bishop but retained his status as a local preacher. Harmon, *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, p. 1441.

<sup>57</sup>Johnson, pp. 166-167; John B. Weaver, "Charles F. Deems; The Ministry as Profession in Nineteenth-Century America," *Methodist History*, XXI, no. 3 (April 1983), p. 157.

<sup>58</sup>Baltimore Conference Journal, March 16, 1837, p. 84, manuscript in Lovely Lane Museum; *Those Incredible Methodists*, pp. 145-146.

<sup>59</sup>*The Christian Advocate and Journal* (New York), July 21, 1847.

<sup>60</sup>John Hamilton of "Locust Hill," p. 2.

<sup>61</sup>Stephen Elmer Slocum, "The American Tract Society: 1825-1975," doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1975, pp. 86-87.

<sup>62</sup>American Tract Society, "Instructions of the Executive Committee of the American Tract Society to Colporteurs and Agents" (New York, n.d.), p. 29, quoted in Slocum, p. 89.

John Wesley Osborne began his labors as a colporteur for the American Tract Society in Chesterfield County, Virginia, on June 18, 1851. In his report to the Society eight months later he recorded having distributed (sold or given) over 1,700 volumes, held 42 prayer meetings, and visited 535 families. He commented that "two thirds of all the families of this county are destitute of all religious books except the Bible, and some have not even a Bible in the house," and he further wrote that "there are a great many adult persons who cannot read or write."<sup>64</sup> The following year, he reported that in Chesterfield County he had "preached in all the churches, addressed all the sabbath-schools, and very often preached to the children alone, with marked effect," and that 121 persons had been converted at meetings he had held.<sup>65</sup> The implication is that he operated in the area not only as a distributor of tracts but also as a revival or camp meeting preacher. During his second year as a colporteur, he attended a colporteur convention in Richmond where workers in seven states discussed their work, including both the problems and the successes.<sup>66</sup>

A challenge in the 1853 Annual Report of the American Tract Society points out the prospects for Illinois where "lies undeveloped in the soil the bread that is to sustain millions of the human family. Railroads are now projected and being built in all directions." It is further suggested in the report that colporteurs could be carried on the railroads to plant the "seeds of a living Christianity."<sup>67</sup> Later that year, John Wesley Osborne did just that. He moved to Chicago and began work as a colporteur on the Illinois Central Railroad just after it had inaugurated its first passenger and freight service. The railroad paid him a salary and gave him free transportation.<sup>68</sup> This work along the line of the Illinois Central Railroad provided Osborne with a new missionary venture. For his wife, it meant going to the city where her sister, Mrs. Leander McCormick, lived when the Osbornes moved with their two daughters and three sons to Chicago in 1853.<sup>69</sup>

During his first year as a colporteur on the Illinois Central Railroad, Osborne travelled over twenty thousand miles, going "with the cars every

<sup>63</sup>Slocum, pp. 88-92. For an excellent picture of the colporteur work, see the section on "Colporteurs" in *The American Tract Society Documents, 1824-1925* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), pp. 23-69.

<sup>64</sup>American Tract Society, *Twenty-seventh Annual Report for the year ending March 1, 1852*, pp. 68, 96.

<sup>65</sup>American Tract Society, *Twenty-eighth Annual Report for the year ending March 1, 1853*, pp. 58, 94.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>68</sup>American Tract Society, *Twenty-ninth Annual Report for the year ending March 1, 1854*, p. 123.

<sup>69</sup>The McCormick families—Cyrus and Leander—had moved from Virginia to Chicago a few years earlier to establish a factory for producing their mechanical reaper.

day." He attempted to talk with all of the travellers both to distribute religious literature and to counsel and comfort those in need, and he held religious services at stations along the railroad.<sup>70</sup> During his second year in Chicago, the summer of 1854, an epidemic of cholera broke out killing thousands of persons and slowing down construction to extend the railroad.<sup>71</sup> Osborne thanked God that he was able to continue to travel without having any illness, and he expressed the wish that all railroad companies in America would follow the example of the Illinois Central in spreading the gospel of Christ.<sup>72</sup> The officials of the Illinois Central Railroad seemed to show concern for establishing a moral and religious base as they vigorously promoted settlement in Illinois, or perhaps they were trying to attract a desirable type of settler. Whatever their motive, in addition to encouraging the colporteur work, they gave land to churches and even expressed reluctance to run trains on the Sabbath when conditions necessitated the moving of products and people on Sundays.<sup>73</sup> Osborne observed that the conductors and other workers on the trains "are gentlemen of high character . . . we have no such thing as profanity or intemperance on these passenger trains, for God is known and here acknowledged."<sup>74</sup>

The report of Osborne for his third year on the railroad indicates that the work had become more organized, especially through the establishment of Sunday Schools and encouragement to congregations to begin planning for church buildings when they outgrew the railroad stations. "Whatever may be the future greatness of these station towns," Osborne wrote, "we are grateful that the American Tract Society was so early permitted to sound the gospel trumpet here, and unfurl the banner of salvation on these great prairies of the West."<sup>75</sup> He supplied all of the trains with Bibles, established religious libraries in the "public rooms" of hotels along the line, visited the sick, conducted marriages and funerals, preached in Presbyterian and Methodist Episcopal churches, and held revival meetings, as well as selling tracts on the trains and preaching in the stations. He observed that "the towns at the stations on the line of the railroad are steadily increasing; new comers appear every week; so much so, that it requires constant attention to visit them and know the moral and intellectual character of the population. . . ."<sup>76</sup>

<sup>70</sup>American Tract Society, *Twenty-ninth Annual Report for the year ending March 1, 1854*, p. 123.

<sup>71</sup>Carlton J. Corliss, *Main Line of Mid-America; the Story of the Illinois Central* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1950), p. 55.

<sup>72</sup>American Tract Society, *Thirtieth Annual Report for the year ending March 1, 1855*, pp. 144-145.

<sup>73</sup>Corliss, pp. 75-76.

<sup>74</sup>American Tract Society, *Thirty-First Annual Report for the year ending March 1, 1856*, p. 126.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 127.

By the end of his fourth year on the railroad, Osborne could report that "at places where I first preached in a shanty, and in the car on the track, we now have a good church building, and at some places two, three, and four, in use every Sabbath."<sup>77</sup> That year, however, he became affiliated with a denomination and ceased to devote his labors exclusively to the ecumenical work of the American Tract Society. He became a missionary on the railroad for the Protestant Episcopal Church in the summer of 1857, combining that work with his tract society ministry until 1860 when he severed his relationship with the American Tract Society.<sup>78</sup>

Henry John Whitehouse, bishop of the Illinois Diocese, reported in his address of September 1856 that there were several promising candidates for Holy Orders, one of whom was the Reverend John Wesley Osborne.<sup>79</sup> On March 31, 1857, his examinations for the Diaconate were held by the bishop who remarked that Reverend Osborne already "is officiating on parts of the Illinois Central Railroad, along which he has been engaged for some years in connection with one of the large national Societies. The local knowledge and experience may, I hope, prove serviceable to the Church."<sup>80</sup> The ordination took place on April 5th in Grace Church, Chicago, where Osborne preached that evening at Bishop Whitehouse's request.<sup>81</sup> In the assignments of Episcopal ministers for 1857, J. W. Osborne, Deacon, is listed as a Missionary on the Illinois Central Railroad.<sup>82</sup> The following year, "On the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels, September 29, 1858, in St. John's Church, Chicago," Bishop Whitehouse reported, "I admitted John Wesley Osborne to the order of Priests, and ordained him."<sup>83</sup>

Osborne's Methodist background and experience were quite unusual for an Episcopal clergyman, although he did have more education than the average Methodist circuit rider on the frontier and had married into a family with some wealth. The Protestant Episcopal Church had not

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<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 127-128. *Annual Report of the Chicago Agency of the American Tract Society 1857*, p. 11. For a good account of colonization along the Illinois Central Railroad, see Paul Wallace Gates, *The Illinois Central Railroad and Its Colonization Work* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934).

<sup>77</sup>*Annual Report of the Chicago Agency of the American Tract Society, 1858*, p. 13.

<sup>78</sup>American Tract Society, *Thirty-Sixth Annual Report for the year ending March 1, 1861*, p. 57.

<sup>79</sup>*Journal of the Protestant Episcopal Church, Diocese of Illinois, 1856*, p. 21. All manuscript records of the Illinois diocese were burned in the Chicago fire of 1871. The printed records show a close association between Bishop Whitehouse and Osborne, and the bishop may have influenced Osborne to take orders in the Episcopal church. Unfortunately, the loss of the manuscript records limits research on Osborne's missionary work for the Episcopal church.

<sup>80</sup>*Journal of the Protestant Episcopal Church, Diocese of Illinois, 1857*, p. 11.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 1859, p. 35.

adapted to the rapidly growing population in the West as had the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. This was in part due to the lack of a system of itineracy and to high educational requirements for the clergy. Missionaries for the Episcopal church usually "were not sent to the actual frontier, but to the region behind it, where stable settlements had already begun to develop,"<sup>84</sup> lending basis for the allegation that the Episcopal church only arrived with the Pullman car. "It was the Methodist circuit rider, or the itinerant Baptist preacher, or the hardy Presbyterian minister who was to be found doing the pioneer work of the frontier."<sup>85</sup> A few Episcopal ministers, however, did go on their own to serve the westward moving population. One of these, Philander Chase, in 1835 was elected Bishop of Illinois, a diocese with five clergymen and thirty-nine communicants.<sup>86</sup> When Chase died in 1852, Henry John Whitehouse became the second Bishop of Illinois, taking over a diocese which had grown to forty clergy and about a thousand communicants.<sup>87</sup>

From 1858 when Osborne became a priest in the Episcopal church, Bishop Whitehouse in his address to the convention each year told about riding the trains with "the Rev. Mr. Osborne" and commented on the work along the line. At services held during their tours, the bishop usually preached and Osborne read prayers and assisted. The bishop's addresses often referred to the need to hold the services in Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, and churches of other denominations, as well as in courthouses and railway stations. He noted in 1862 that "there is scarcely a place in which there are not Episcopalians . . . but there is not a building belonging to us from Chicago to Cairo."<sup>88</sup> Bishop Whitehouse could see that the congregations were small and unable to afford services "except for the very limited salary which Mr. Osborne is content to receive," and he referred to Osborne as "the father of all the work for the church along that line [Illinois Central Railroad], and contiguous points on the intersecting road."<sup>89</sup> The bishop believed that because the railroad companies had set up communities that were dependent on the railroads, they had an obligation to the people who settled there to allow ministers to ride the trains free.<sup>90</sup> Although the railroad did continue to give partial passes to mis-

<sup>84</sup>William W. Manross, *A History of the American Episcopal Church* (New York: Morehouse-Gorham Co., 1959), p. 256.

<sup>85</sup>Hugh L. Burleson, *The Conquest of the Continent* (Milwaukee: Morehouse Pub. Co., 1911), p. 64.

<sup>86</sup>Philander Chase, *Reminiscences*, Vol. 2 (Boston, 1848), p. 233.

<sup>87</sup>*The Episcopal Church in Fulton County, Illinois* (Canton, Ill., 1959), p. 33.

<sup>88</sup>Bishop's address, *Journal of the Protestant Episcopal Church, Diocese of Illinois, 1859*, pp. 17, 19; 1860, p. 7; 1861, p. 10; 1862, p. 16; 1863, p. 24; 1864, p. 47; 1865, pp. 16-17.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 1861, p. 10; 1862, p. 16. In 1861 Rev. Osborne's salary as a missionary for the church was \$200 per year, *ibid.*, 1861, p. 36.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 1862, pp. 31-32; 1863, p. 24.

sionaries riding the trains, and land for building churches, no longer did ministers receive free passes and salary like Osborne had at the beginning of his work with the American Tract Society.<sup>91</sup>

Osborne's reports each year from congregations along the line of the railroad show a progressive change in attitude from the optimism of his first years with the Episcopal church to a decided pessimism by the late 1860's about the establishment of Episcopal churches. For instance, his early reports for the Episcopal congregation at Salem present a strong congregation with the need to build a church and have a regular minister, but in 1870 he bemoaned the fact that the people could find no place suitable for worship. The membership at Salem had dropped from 64 in 1862 to 26 in 1870.<sup>92</sup> In 1861 and 1862, Osborne had great hopes for the parish in Centralia, but a few years later his reports mention his trouble in keeping the "little flock" together and that the Sunday School had to close because they had no suitable place to meet.<sup>93</sup> The theme throughout is that progress in establishing the Episcopal church in Illinois was being hampered by lack of church buildings and a dependence on facilities of other denominations which were rapidly growing. The Episcopal Board of Missions in 1868 pointed out in their report that the opening of railroads had brought a large eastern population to southern Illinois and "other Christian bodies are sending their best men and building handsome churches," but that the Episcopal church had not met the challenge. The report discloses that in 1855 they had nine parishes and four clergy in southern Illinois, and in 1867 they still had only nine parishes and four clergy.<sup>94</sup> The failure of the Protestant Episcopal Church to expand as other denominations were doing apparently was not due to its missionary down the line of the railroad but rather to a lack of commitment on the part of the church leadership. Osborne worked hard to carry out his ministerial duties to the people in Arcola, Bement, Centralia, Mattoon, Salem, Tuscola, Rantoul, Effingham, and other towns. He saw to "the catechetical instruction of our children" in their homes and attended to "visiting the sick, burying the dead, baptizing the children and adults, administering the Holy Communion, and preaching the Gospel of Christ."<sup>95</sup>

Osborne served as a missionary for the Diocese of Illinois from 1857 to 1872, and during those years he and his family resided in Chicago at 51 South Curtis Street as the base from which he went out daily on the trains. Bishop Whitehouse involved Osborne in activities of the diocese in Chicago such as serving on a committee on church extension, assisting

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<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 1863, p. 24.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 1859, p. 82; 1860, p. 59; 1861, p. 73; 1870, p. 118.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 1861, p. 48; 1862, p. 48; 1864, p. 73; 1867, p. 78.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 1868, p. 30.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 1862, pp. 45-46.

in the "laying on of hands" in ordination services, leading services at conventions, and assisting the bishop in services. Two assignments from the bishop were particularly appropriate for this former Methodist preacher — assisting as examiner for a candidate to the Episcopal ministry coming from the Methodists and serving as an "assessor" in the trial of an Episcopal minister charged with "immoral and scandalous conduct." The assessors unanimously acquitted the minister, unlike the verdict which Osborne himself had received in the Methodist church fifteen years earlier.<sup>96</sup>

Life for the family in Chicago was not easy with the small income Osborne received from the Episcopal church. Two more daughters were born to John and Rachel after they removed to Chicago, and Rachel died in 1863 leaving these two little girls to be raised by their elder sister. The oldest son when still a teenager returned to Virginia and joined the Confederate army, and the next son began earning his own living as a farm hand at the age of fourteen. After the war, these two went west to New Mexico territory to seek their fortune in raising sheep. The third son trained in the Nashotah seminary in Wisconsin and became an Episcopal minister. Although Osborne's brother-in-law, Leander McCormick, was wealthy, there is no evidence that he helped the Osbornes. One of the Osborne sons remembered that the McCormicks seldom visited the "preacher's home," but when the McCormicks were burned out in the Chicago fire of October 1871, they lived with the Osbornes until they could rebuild.<sup>97</sup> Leander McCormick and his brother Cyrus lost millions in the fire, including their homes and the reaper works.<sup>98</sup>

The year after the Chicago fire, Osborne became ill and had to give up his work. He wrote to Bishop Whitehouse from Springfield, Ohio, where he had gone to his brother's home, that "the very hot weather, being called out of bed at night to visit the sick and dying, attending funerals, and the very heavy pastoral work was too much for me. On the 1st of August, I was stricken down with a bilious fever." He added that he had no money for his needs because he had spent all that he had to make the trip to Springfield, and he asked the bishop for an appropriation from the Aged and Infirm Clergy Fund.<sup>99</sup> The following year, however, his health must have improved, because on March 29, 1873, Bishop Whitehouse wrote a letter recommending the Reverend Osborne to the Diocese of Maryland where he was accepted on April 2, 1873.<sup>100</sup> Although

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, 1862, p. 13; 1863, pp. 14, 22; 1864, pp. 41, 43, 50; 1865, pp. 17, 37.

<sup>97</sup>Letter from Robert Osborne to Betty Young, July 18, 1981.

<sup>98</sup>Elias Colbert, *Chicago and the Great Conflagration* (Cincinnati and New York: C. F. Vent, 1872), p. 341.

<sup>99</sup>Letter from John Wesley Osborne to Bishop H. J. Whitehouse, *Journal of the Protestant Episcopal Church, Diocese of Illinois, 1872*, p. 90.

<sup>100</sup>Letter Dimissory from the Rt. Rev. H. J. Whitehouse, Bishop of Illinois, to "The Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese of Maryland," March 29, 1873, Episcopal Records, Maryland Historical Society.

Osborne had been gone from Baltimore for twenty years, he still had family, including a sister, living in Baltimore.

At the age of sixty-seven years, Osborne embarked on a new missionary work for the Maryland Diocese of the Protestant Episcopal Church by serving small and newly-organized congregations. For four years he worked at a small parish in Sunderlandville, Calvert County, Maryland, and wrote to his bishop expressing satisfaction with his work knowing that "there is a hand unseen that holds me up."<sup>101</sup> From 1877 through 1880 he preached at small churches in the Baltimore area—Henshaw, All Saints' Church, and the Church of Our Saviour where he was said to be willing "to enter upon the work among us . . . at the very small salary we are able to pay him."<sup>102</sup> In April 1880 the Dean of the Convocation of Baltimore reported the initiation of services at Calverton outside the city limits by the missionary John Wesley Osborne who has "found there in the neighborhood 23 communicants" and "officiates regularly twice on Sunday and on Thursday nights."<sup>103</sup> Osborne very nearly fulfilled his wish expressed in a letter to his son that he might "fall on Zion's battlehill, where I expect to fall like a hero, and die at my post."<sup>104</sup> Less than a year after failing health terminated his work, he died in the Episcopal Church Home in Baltimore on April 22, 1881, of "hemorrhage of the lungs."<sup>105</sup> His body was taken to Chicago for burial beside his wife in Graceland cemetery which had been founded only three years before her death in 1863 and where "lie the pioneers, leaders, builders and dreamers who wrote the story of the Midwest with their lives. . . ."<sup>106</sup> Although never considered among these leaders in their own day, ministers like the Reverend John Wesley Osborne had helped to write that story by supplying the religious element.

John Wesley Osborne spent his life as a pioneer in the westward movement, carrying out a missionary work of seeking to find people who needed to be gathered into the fold of Christianity. He was too independent to be confined by the rigid regulations and petty in-fighting of the Methodists during his early ministerial career, and for this came into conflict with his fellow clergy. He then turned to a more ecumenical way to serve the needs of a moving and sometimes isolated population. Working along the railroad on the frontier, both with the American Tract Society and the

<sup>101</sup> John Wesley Osborne to Bishop William R. Whittingham of the Maryland Diocese, April 8, 1873, Episcopal Records, Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>102</sup> William Oliver, Jr. to Bishop William R. Whittingham, September 14, 1876, Episcopal Records, Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>103</sup> Report of Rev. Arthur Rich, Dean of the Convocation of Baltimore, April 1880, pp. 22-23, Episcopal Records, Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>104</sup> John Wesley Osborne to Frank Olin Osborne, April 9, 1878, owned by Betty Young; copy in the Episcopal Records, Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>105</sup> Obituary in the *Baltimore Gazette*, April 25, 1881.

<sup>106</sup> "Historical Sketch of Graceland Cemetery, Chicago," brochure about the cemetery, 4001 N. Clark St., Chicago.

Protestant Episcopal Church, Osborne carried out his calling with a strong commitment because, in his words, "out here in the far West, in many places they never hear a preacher," and unless ministers "go from house to house and warn the people, hundreds will die in their sins without hearing of the great salvation."<sup>107</sup> The very qualities that had made his ministry within the Methodist church difficult were important in meeting the challenges of a ministry to the mobile population of a developing frontier. He had clashed with the Methodists over inadequate remuneration for his work when his family was young, but after he went west he showed an unusual willingness to serve for little reward except the satisfaction of saving souls. However, in spite of his dedication as a missionary preacher, he never lost his independent nature. After his return to Baltimore in his old age, he reacted negatively to church members in the city who "all love their bended knees" by writing that "I have no idea of being tied up head and heels to please and gratify some religious devotee. They all want the Clergy to go along the street and look as blank as if they had lost six pence."<sup>108</sup> Neither fame nor fortune rewarded the efforts of Osborne or other unknown pioneers of the church, but their dedication and sacrifice bore fruit in carrying Christianity to the expanding settlements of the new nation. Theirs was a vision that could not be confined within the narrow limits of any one denomination or of the cities in the East.

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<sup>107</sup>*Annual Report of the Chicago Agency of the American Tract Society, 1858, p. 14.*

<sup>108</sup>John Wesley Osborne to Frank Olin Osborne, April 9, 1878.