

THE METHODIST CHURCH (1866) IN NORTH CAROLINA

Homer M. Keever

In November 1866, the northern and western conferences of the Methodist Protestant Church met in Allegheny, Pennsylvania and organized "The Methodist Church."¹ The name was chosen in the hope that a merger could be worked out with the Wesleyan Methodists and some other small bodies of anti-slavery Methodists. To the historian this church is "The Methodist Church 1866," to distinguish it from "The Methodist Church" of 1939.

The organization of the Methodist Church 1866 simply formalized a condition that had been in existence since 1858, when those northern and western conferences had withdrawn after the General Conference of 1858 refused to accede to their demands that "white" be stricken from the constitution and that voluntary slave-holding be made a barrier to membership in the church.

The Wesleyan Methodist Church did not cooperate in the proposed union, and by 1871 plans were underway for unification of the two branches of Methodist Protestantism. After a formal division of eleven years, this unification took place in 1877 and the name adopted by the merged church was again "The Methodist Protestant Church." The Methodist Church 1866 had passed into history.

Throughout the existence of the Methodist Church 1866, there were one or two small conferences of that body in North Carolina.² In 1867 there was a North Carolina Conference. Later there were two conferences known as the East North Carolina and the West North Carolina. At the time of reunification in 1877, these conferences were called the Eastern North Carolina and the Western North Carolina. After union the Eastern North Carolina Conference became the Deep River Conference and the Western North Carolina Conference became the Allegheny Conference. The latter did not last beyond 1880, but there was a Deep River Conference until about 1890.

¹"The Methodist Church" in Matthew Simpson, ed., *Cyclopedia of Methodism*, 4th rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881), p. 590.

²Minutes of the General Conferences, The Methodist Church. Also listed in Edward J. Drinkhouse, *History of Methodist Reform* (Baltimore and Pittsburgh: Board of Publication, The Methodist Protestant Church, 1899), Vol. II, p. 497.

As the Methodist Church 1866 was being organized there was a petition from Jamestown, North Carolina, for recognition on the grounds that "they were isolated by rebellion and oppression."³ The petition was favorably entertained and a district was set off to be known as "the North Carolina District of the Methodist Church." Jamestown was on Deep River in Guilford County.

Fair Grove Resolutions

It is likely that the Jamestown protest saying "they were isolated by rebellion and oppression" grew out of the "Fair Grove Resolutions of 1863," so called because they had been passed that year by the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church meeting at Fair Grove Church in Rockingham County.

That conference agreed to appoint a committee of examination to attend to the case of Benjamin Weisner and Franklin Moss of the Mocksville Circuit, candidates for Deacon's orders, "it being inconvenient for them to attend the present conference."⁴ Both Weisner and Moss were from the Iredell County part of the Mocksville Circuit, a section almost up in arms against the prosecution of the war and where many were hiding out rather than go into the army.

In September of that year Colonel S.A. Sharpe had set up a camp for the home guard at Union Grove with orders to arrest "every deserter and reluctant conscript,"⁵ and some 500 men had gathered on the Wilkes County line, threatening to "bushwhack" the home guard. No fight developed, but there is a good tradition that some 20 escaped in a group and crossed the mountains to join the Federal troops in Tennessee. Some of Benjamin Weisner's people were among them, and Benjamin Weisner himself became one of the leading preachers in the Deep River Conference. One suspects that the inconvenience of his attendance at conference was connected with troubles in north Iredell County.

Immediately after the action to appoint a committee to examine Weisner and Moss, Jesse H. Page from the eastern part of the state, a member of the conference and a private in the Confederate Army, introduced the series of resolutions that became known as the "Fair Grove Resolutions." They read:

Whereas our country is involved in a bloody and desolating war: and whereas circumstances clearly justify and imperatively demand an unequivocal expression of the sentiments of this conference, therefore

³Drinkhouse, Vol. II, p. 479.

⁴Manuscript minutes of the North Carolina Conference, Methodist Protestant Church, Vol. II, p. 417. Hereafter cited as NCMP.

⁵John McCoy Sharpe Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, N.C. See also Homer M. Keever, *Iredell — Piedmont County* (Statesville, N.C.: The Author, 1976), pp. 235-36.

1st, resolved, that we view the policy adopted by the Lincoln government of employing force as a means of restoring the union of the states as unwise and as a crime against Christianity, civilization, and humanity, especially when we consider the cruel and barbarous manner in which the war is being waged against us.

2nd, We regard the separation of the Northern and Southern States as final; and a reunion impossible, and we declare it, by us undesirable.

3rd, Resolved, that we desire and pray for peace to be restored to us, yet we hope for it and look for it only in our independence and separate existence as a nation and that we will cordially give our sympathy and support to our government in securing these desirable ends; and that we have no sympathy to those who would give aid and comfort to our enemies in the prosecution of their wicked purposes.⁶

In spite of attempts by C. F. Harris, who had been president of the conference during the early years of the war, the resolutions were passed almost intact.⁷ And immediately following the defeat of Harris' attempt to moderate the language, Quinton Holton, who had been president the year before, asked for but did not obtain a leave of absence from the conference.⁸ When the first General Convention of the Methodist Church 1866 met in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1867, Holton was present as a clerical delegate from the North Carolina Conference.⁹

One incident aside from his answer to the roll call marked Holton's presence. The minutes of the conference tell that "it being stated that Bro. Holton, delegate from the North Carolina District, had lost his pocketbook and its contents, the conference took up a collection of \$27.75 on his behalf, which was handed to him with thanks on his part."¹⁰ One other item appears in those first General Conference minutes. The North Carolina Mission Conference was recognized, with 12 itinerant ministers, five unstationed ministers, and 900 members.

Michaux Report

In December 1867, at the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, the president, J. L. Michaux, reviewed at length a defection which was occurring in several portions of the district:

A movement was set on foot some twelve months since, under the leadership of Rev. Quinton Holton, with the avowed purpose of reconstructing the Methodist Protestant Church. There are handfuls of this new sect calling themselves "The Methodist Church" in the following places, viz. Guilford, Ashboro, Yadkin, Mocksville. While some entire societies are reported to be gone in Iredell, Cleveland, and Green River. I first encountered the new sect in the Yadkin Circuit, where some twenty members have been led away. Subsequently I encountered it in Cleveland and McDowell circuits, where I am satisfied that, with proper encouragement on our part, the delusion cannot long survive.¹¹

⁶NCMP, Vol. II, pp. 417-18.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 423.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 433.

⁹Minutes of the General Conference, The Methodist Church, 1867.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹NCMP, Vol. III, pp. 36f.

Michaux reported that he had not been able to supply Iredell, a new circuit formed from the Mocksville Circuit the year before, and he was not certain what was happening there. On some of the other circuits he was more definite.

Catawba Circuit: The superintendent of this field is Rev. James Deans. I paid him a short visit within a few weeks past. Bro. Deans has been troubled by the reconstructionists, but at last accounts they were yielding ground.

Cleveland Circuit: This was left by our last annual conference without a superintendent, understanding that Bro. Adam Hunt should be employed by me. In a short time thereafter he gave his adherence to the reconstructionist party, carrying with him many members of the circuit.

McDowell Circuit was placed in the hands of Rev. R. R. Brookshier, who became a convert to the reconstructionist doctrine and connected himself with the so-called Methodist Church. All the societies save one, he represents as having gone with the new movement. One society remains firm and true and desires a preacher to be sent for the next year.¹²

Quinton Holton

The leader in the movement was Quinton Holton, a Guilford County native from the Deep River section near Fairfield Methodist Protestant Church, just east of High Point and Jamestown. Family tradition is that he was of Quaker background and had freed his slaves. He had been admitted to the North Carolina Methodist Protestant Conference in 1843, and in 1847 had been sent to organize the Mocksville Circuit across the Yadkin River.¹³ One of the churches on that circuit was Union Grove in Iredell County, near Jacob Crater's mill on Rocky Creek.

Jacob Crater had led a movement to that section from Guilford and Davidson counties in the early 1840s, mainly his family and their in-laws. His sons and daughters had intermarried with the family of Frederick and Elizabeth White, and the migration was a fairly large one. Also moving to Iredell a little later was Benjamin Weisner, who had married Mary (Polly) White, another daughter of Frederick and Elizabeth.

Jacob Crater is credited with the introduction of the grinding of wheat into flour in that section, having sent back to Guilford for French buhrs when he found none along Rocky Creek.¹⁴ Quinton Holton and his sons and brother took over the Crater mill and for the next ten years he lived in that section. Until 1850 he was superintendent of the Mocksville Circuit. Then, with a gentle admonition from the president, he was demoted to an assistant on the same circuit. From then until 1859 he held a tenuous relationship to the conference, running Crater's mill to make a living for his family and preaching when he could. The Panic of 1857 for a while ruined the emerging industry along the north Iredell creeks, and

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Keever, p. 194.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 121.

Quinton Holton was caught in the crush, losing much of his holdings.¹⁵

Holton became active again in the conference and was appointed in 1859 and 1860 to the Cleveland Circuit. Then, after a year on the Roanoke Circuit in eastern North Carolina, he was elected president of the Conference on the second ballot and held that position during the crucial war year of 1863. After he was defeated for a second term of office and had given up the reins of the conference just before the Fair Grove Resolutions had come up, he was criticized for his administration and was left without an appointment at his own request during 1864.

The criticism of Holton's administration had come from Dr. L. W. Batchelor, lay delegate from the Halifax Circuit and one of the leading laymen of the conference. For years Batchelor had been involved in a running fight within the conference on the matter of lay representation. He objected to the appointment of a lay delegate for any minister except one actually stationed. During the year Holton had appointed J. W. Kennett as an assistant on the Mocksville Circuit, an appointment considered nominal since Kennett preached no more than once a month. Holton, with the backing of Kennett and Alson Gray, took umbrage at Batchelor's objection and entered a protest that his action had indeed been constitutional.¹⁶ It was a minor matter, and Batchelor was simply following his established pattern, but Holton took it personally and likely considered it part of his isolation. Besides, Batchelor was from the east, which had pushed through the Fair Grove Resolutions.

At the conference of 1865, held at Enfield in the eastern part of the state, "when the name of Q. Holton was called, Brother [Alson] Gray made a statement in regard to certain rumors in reference to the actions of this brother, when on motion of J. L. Michaux, a committee of three was appointed, consisting of J. L. Michaux, Dr. L. W. Batchelor and B. Davidson, whose duty it shall be to learn the particulars as far as possible and report the same to this body."¹⁷ Later Michaux reported that the committee found no tangible evidence to substantiate the rumors and Holton's character was passed by the conference.¹⁸ However, he was placed on the unstationed list that year and disappears from the records of the North Carolina Methodist Protestant Conference.

Western Circuits

Aside from Iredell, where Holton spent much of his early ministry, and the Deep River section, his original home, the main focus of the new

¹⁵This statement is based mainly on tradition which the author picked up in Iredell County. There is a mortgage to document it, but the author was unable to locate it in Iredell County Deeds and had planned another search.

¹⁶NCMP, Vol. II, p. 428.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 479.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 494.

Methodist Church 1866 was in the counties along the mountains in the western part of the state — Cleveland, McDowell, Rutherford, Polk, and western Lincoln.

The first Methodist Protestant circuit to be organized in that section came into existence during 1848.¹⁹ Alson Gray, president of the North Carolina Conference that year, found Joseph Parker, said to have been a retired Methodist preacher from the South Carolina Conference, preaching and organizing churches in Cleveland County with a combined membership of more than 150. These congregations asked the North Carolina Methodist Protestant Conference to take oversight of them and to admit Joseph Parker as a member of the conference. That conference, meeting at Mt. Hermon in Alamance County, acceded to both requests and Joseph Parker was appointed to the Cleveland Circuit.

In 1862, when the Catawba Circuit was first cut off from the Cleveland Circuit, seven churches were listed within the bounds of the Cleveland Circuit — Bess Chapel, Friendship, Keeslers, Moriah, Williams, Pleasant Hill, and Piney Grove.²⁰

In 1849 a McDowell Mission was set off from the Cleveland Circuit with Joseph Parker as superintendent. Two years later the churches on that mission were included in the newly formed Buncombe Circuit.²¹ Later, in 1864, the mission was reestablished with six churches. In the meantime a Green River Mission had been set up in western Rutherford and Polk Counties in 1859.²² The work was unstable and during the Civil War it was merged with McDowell, then separated and merged again, until finally in 1866 it became a separate circuit.

One other western Methodist Protestant Circuit should be mentioned, not because it went off into the Methodist Church 1866 but rather because it did not. In 1850 Andrew Pickens, an old Methodist Episcopal Church, South minister, was turned out of a church near Reems Creek (Weaverville) in Buncombe County because he objected to the Sons of Temperance using one of his churches as a meeting place.²³ Pickens and an entire congregation seceded from the M. E. Church, South and asked to become a part of the Methodist Protestant Church in the Cleveland Circuit. In 1867 Michaux noted that "this circuit [Buncombe] was also selected as a victim of the lying pretensions of the new Methodist party and the train was already laid to blow it up: but Thank God! the expectations of our enemies were disappointed, and Buncombe Circuit is

¹⁹*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 226.

²⁰*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 385.

²¹*Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 275, 321.

²²*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 276.

²³John Paris, *An Exposure of the Shameful Religious Persecution suffered by A. Pickens and others at the Hands of Rev. William Hicks* (Greeneville, Tenn., 1854).

thoroughly and unanimously Methodist Protestant."²⁴

Western Leaders

The conference of 1866 had gone out of its way to supply the western circuits with local men, and those men became the leaders in the withdrawal in that section. Adam Hunt was sent to the Cleveland Circuit. He first appears as a lay delegate from Cleveland in 1857. In 1862 he was ordained deacon and in 1864 was recommended for the itineracy. His first actual appointment was the Cleveland Circuit in 1867. Before long he withdrew, taking the circuit with him. No more appointments were made for Cleveland by the North Carolina Conference until 1879, when the Allegheny Conference was being reabsorbed into the parent conference. Adam Hunt was still pastor and continued for another year.

The pastor appointed to the McDowell Circuit in 1866 was R. R. Brookshier.²⁵ He appeared at conference that year as lay delegate from McDowell, was very active in the business of the conference, was received into the itineracy, and was given his appointment. After he took much of his circuit out with him, the conference kept on making appointments to a McDowell Circuit, but it had little success in getting anyone to stay, although one society did remain faithful and kept on asking for pastors.

The third appointment in that section by the 1866 conference was that of L. M. Nolen to the Green River Mission.²⁶ Like Hunt and Brookshier, he was comparatively new on the scene. He had been ordained a deacon in 1865 and sent to the Catawba Circuit before his appointment to Green River. Nolen, like Hunt, was to receive an appointment in 1879, when the Allegheny Conference was being absorbed by the North Carolina Conference, first to Kings Mountain and then to the Caldwell Circuit, where he was reappointed for four years. In 1884 he is recorded as "not heard from" and was dropped from the roll. His name appears in an 1885 list of Deep River Conference ministers.

Reaction to the withdrawal of the three men in the North Carolina Conference was swift. Without much ado their names were ordered stricken from the roll of ministers, and along with them the name of Joseph Parker was also removed. In the 1850s he had served on several piedmont circuits — Yadkin, Monroe, Guilford — before he was superannuated in 1859. In 1867 his name was not only stricken from the list, but he also lost whatever claim he had to a share of the superannuate fund.

²⁴NCMP, Vol. II, p. 37.

²⁵Reubin R. Brookshier appears as a class leader in 1845 in the Wilkes Circuit records of the M. E. Church, South. Later he owned property on Muddy Creek in McDowell County.

²⁶L. M. Nolen appears in the Lincolnton quarterly conference records of the M. E. Church, South, as a class leader in 1856 and was licensed to preach in 1858.

William M. Kerr

By the time of a second General Conference of the Methodist Church 1866 in Pittsburgh, May 17, 1871, leadership of the North Carolina Conference of that body had passed into the hands of William McKendree Kerr. He was a native of Mecklenburg County and grew up in the neighborhood of Trinity M. E. Church, South, northwest of Charlotte, a member of one of the first Methodist families of that section.²⁷ In 1838 he was admitted to the itineracy of the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and served until 1847, when he withdrew. In 1849 he appears in the quarterly conference records of the Lincolnton Circuit, as a local elder and with the title of doctor, likely an M.D. He was connected with the churches in Gaston County and was very active in organizing the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in that section, especially at the new county seat, Dallas.²⁸

In 1858, at the third quarterly conference, a complaint was lodged against him for attending some function of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Northern Methodist). Unfortunately the function itself is not legible in the Lincolnton Circuit minutes, and we do not know exactly what he did to deserve the censure. We do know that at the next quarterly conference he acknowledged his fault and was restored. He does not appear again on the Lincolnton Circuit, but during the Civil War years, from 1860 until 1868, he was again connected with the Charlotte Circuit as a local elder.²⁹

In the Methodist Church 1866 he was also to attend the General Conference of 1875 as the ministerial representative from the West North Carolina Conference, and in 1877 he was appointed as ministerial delegate from the Western North Carolina Conference to the uniting convention in Baltimore. But like the other elected representatives from the two North Carolina conferences of the Methodist Church 1866, he did not attend. With the ratification of unification of the two churches, he drops from the rolls of the Methodist Protestant Church, and in 1885 he is listed as a trustee of a "Congregational Methodist Church" just north of Charlotte.³⁰

What we know of the man suggests strongly that his withdrawal from the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1847 was because of dissatisfaction over the organization of the

²⁷George W. Bumgarner, "A Brief History of Trinity Methodist Church." Mimeographed copy in Western North Carolina Conference Archives at Charlotte, N.C.

²⁸Lincolnton Circuit Quarterly Conference Minutes. Manuscript Room, Duke University.

²⁹Sugar Creek-Charlotte Circuit Minutes. Manuscript at Western North Carolina Conference Archives, Charlotte, N.C. Between 1858 and 1860 he was likely on the newly formed Dallas Circuit.

³⁰Mecklenburg County Deeds, Vol. 46, p. 484.

church by the southern conferences in 1844. The same conclusions can be drawn from the withdrawal of Joseph Parker and the Cleveland Circuit the same year. Throughout the section of the state lying west of Mecklenburg there are stories of "Northern Methodist" influence in the years following the Civil War. The Shelby District Conference in 1867 complained a great deal about trouble caused by Northern Methodists,³¹ and the southern part of Iredell County abounds with tales of disturbances by Northern Methodists. It is likely that those "Northern Methodists" were not Methodist Episcopal but rather Methodist Church 1866.

Vanderburg and Ferrelltown

The focal point of the "Northern Methodist" influence in south Iredell seems to have been a church still known as Vanderburg. It was a successor to an earlier Methodist Protestant Church — Gethsemenie. In 1869 a deed was made to Gethsemenie Methodist Protestant Church near the roadbed of the Atlantic, Tennessee and Ohio Railroad, north of where Mooresville later grew up.³² Leaders in establishing that church seem to have been Osborne Tatum, a local preacher long associated with the Charlotte Circuit of the South Carolina Conference, and Eli McHargue, a Methodist Protestant leader from north Iredell and secretary of the Deep River Conference in its waning years. For a few years the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church tried to take care of Gethsemenie by assigning it to different circuits — Iredell, Mecklenburg, Rowan. Then in 1876 a new deed was written for much the same property by Levi Vanderburg, and the church was renamed Vanderburg.³³ The new deed was more liberal about who could preach in it. Nothing more is found in Methodist Protestant records about either Gethsemenie or Vanderburg until 1889, when the president of the North Carolina Conference announced that most of its members had left.³⁴ Under the leadership of W. M. Bagby the congregation organized a Southern Methodist Church, which exists today under the name of Vanderburg.³⁵

There was also some Methodist Protestant influence in north Mecklenburg at Ferrelltown, long an antebellum center of Methodism. Before the Civil War a church located there had been known variously as Christenberry's, Nazareth, and Bethesda.³⁶ When unification came in

³¹Shelby District Conference Minutes, M. E. Church, South. Manuscript Room, Duke University.

³²Iredell County Deeds, Book 4, p. 30.

³³Iredell County Deeds, Book 12, p. 140, contains this provision: "Permission to be granted to members of other denominations who are orthodox and in good standing."

³⁴NCMP, Vol. IV, p. 413.

³⁵Iredell County Deeds, Book 19, p. 3.

³⁶Sugar Creek-Charlotte Circuit Quarterly Conference Minutes, 1815-1868.

1938, the church at Ferrelltown was Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church. In the interim a Methodist Protestant congregation functioned. In 1865 a deed was made to Liberty Hill Methodist Protestant Church near Bethesda,³⁷ while Bethesda itself remained on the Charlotte Circuit of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, at least until 1868. Later, in this century, the Liberty Hill property was deeded to Asbury.

Ferrelltown had the reputation of being a nest of anti-slavery sentiment, and in the furor following John Brown's raid one David F. Davis from there was arrested in Charlotte and indicted for expressing anti-slavery sentiments.³⁸ In 1867, 1871, and again in 1873, Davis was lay representative from the Mecklenburg Circuit to the North Carolina Methodist Protestant Conference. Then in 1876, after the pastor's health had failed and the circuit was left unsupplied, one society was reported as having gone off the circuit. That was likely the Liberty Hill Church at Ferrelltown, which very probably was associated with the Methodist Church 1866 during its transition period from Methodist Protestant to Methodist Episcopal.

Allegheny Conference

By the time of reunification in 1877, the Western North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Church 1866 had grown to a membership of just over 1,000, with 18 ministers and 14 churches. The Eastern North Carolina Conference was smaller, with slightly over 500 members, 15 ministers and 11 churches.³⁹ In contrast the parent North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church had 9,300 members, 45 active ministers, and 85 churches.⁴⁰ It must be noted, however, that the North Carolina Conference was one of the larger conferences in the whole connection, and that four of the 23 conferences in the Methodist Church 1866 were smaller than the Eastern North Carolina Conference, while nine others were about the size of the two North Carolina conferences combined. Thus, the Methodist Church 1866 in North Carolina was a factor large enough to be reckoned with.

The Allegheny Conference, successor to the Western North Carolina Conference, did not last long after reunification. Even before 1877 there were signs that those on the old Cleveland Circuit were going back into the Catawba Circuit. In 1875 Peter Bess from Bess Chapel was lay representative from the Catawba Circuit, and in 1876 C. F. Harris, president, noted that many who had been misled ten years earlier had

³⁷Mecklenburg County Deeds, Book 5, p. 191.

³⁸*Carolina Whig* (Charlotte, N.C.), February 7, 1860.

³⁹Drinkhouse, Vol. II, p. 571.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 572.

returned to the bosom of the church.⁴¹ In spite of such signs, however, the same conference, under the leadership of elder statesman W. H. Wills, took two steps to keep control of any merger with the conferences of the Methodist Church 1866.

The conference passed a resolution asking its delegates to the unifying convention to use their best efforts to gain a provision whereby the North Carolina Methodist Protestant Conference would be allowed by vote to accept or reject such ministers from the Methodist Church 1866.⁴² And they refused a petition by Mary M. Parker, widow of Joseph Parker, to participate in the funds of the Superannuate Fund Society, since her husband was not a member of the conference.⁴³

At the conference of 1878, R. R. Brookshier of the Allegheny Conference addressed the North Carolina Conference, and a committee was appointed to meet with the messenger from the Allegheny Conference.⁴⁴ In 1879 those commissioners reported to the Western North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church an agreement that they blend with the Allegheny Conference and receive three of their ministers as regular itinerants — L. M. Nolen, W. P. Martin, and H. L. Proctor — and allow the president, A. M. Lowe, to employ such others as were necessary.⁴⁵ Noticeably absent from that list were R. R. Brookshier and W. M. Kerr.

Western North Carolina Conference

The Western North Carolina Conference which was to merge with the Allegheny Conference is not to be confused with the Western North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Church 1866, which had become the Allegheny Conference. It was the result, rather, of a division of the North Carolina Conference in 1878 into a North Carolina and a Western North Carolina Conference. That arrangement lasted only a year or two, and in 1880 the two were reunited as the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church.⁴⁶

The idea of dividing the North Carolina Conference was not a new one. It went back to the late 1840s and the early 1850s and was inherent in the make-up of the conference. In 1828 the North Carolina Conference was organized from some churches in Halifax and neighboring counties. The next year some churches in Guilford County joined them and the

⁴¹NCMP, Vol. III, p. 381.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 393.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 394.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 412.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 43.

⁴⁶*Minutes of the General Conference, Methodist Protestant Church, 1888*, pp. 41-42. The report also mentions the merger of the Allegheny Conference and the desirability of a merger with the Deep River Conference.

conference grew from those two centers, with a large area between them. Most of the early attempts at division centered around a line running north and south between the two sections of the conference in the neighborhood of Hillsboro. Such attempts were rejected mainly on the grounds that either new conference would be too weak to support a president.

Quinton Holton and his followers were usually for division, and Holton's last official act came in 1864 at Bess Chapel when he suggested that the Pee Dee and Yadkin Rivers be made the line between a western and eastern conference.⁴⁷ The western conference then would include the newer western circuits and Iredell and Davie counties.

At the conference of 1878 a division was rushed through on the old line through Hillsboro. The action was hurriedly taken as if from some kind of pressure from above and was likely part of an arrangement for the absorption of the two Methodist Church 1866 conferences. As each of the conferences met separately in 1878, much of their time was devoted to plans to reunite as soon as possible, a reunification that took place in time for the conference of 1880.

Merger of Allegheny Conference

At that conference A. M. Lowe, who had been president of the Western North Carolina Conference the year before, announced that six circuits had been transferred from the Allegheny Conference — Cleveland, Burke, Kings Mountain, Mitchell, Caldwell, and Henderson. The circuit of R. R. Brookshier was not mentioned. L. M. Nolen was assigned to Kings Mountain, W. P. Martin to the Caldwell Circuit, and H. L. Proctor to the Burke Circuit. And exercising the authority the conference had given him, the president assigned Adam Hunt to the Cleveland Circuit. He was unable to do anything for the Henderson Circuit or the Mitchell Circuit, and they drop from sight except as circuits in the Deep River Conference in 1885.

The Allegheny Conference did not last after 1880. That year it elected Brookshier as its delegate to General Conference and reported a membership of 561.⁴⁸ Then it disappears from the records, and Brookshier became connected with the Deep River Conference and was its leader in later years.

Deep River Conference

The Deep River Conference, originally the Eastern North Carolina Conference, lasted on for another ten years. An elderly layman from north Iredell, Frank Templeton, told the author in the 1940s that he

⁴⁷NCMP, Vol. II, p. 466.

⁴⁸Drinkhouse, Vol. II, pp. 587, 592.

attended the last conference at Sandy Ridge Church in 1891, when Brookshier and Eli McHargue, president and secretary, attempted to keep all the churches from uniting with the Blue Ridge Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1884 both men were present from the Deep River Conference at the General Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church in Baltimore.⁴⁹

To the Iredell churches in the Deep River Conference must be added the churches in the original Deep River area. Michaux, in his 1867 report, singled out Fairfield Church near High Point as having reconstructionist tendencies. That was the church in Quinton Holton's neighborhood. Michaux also mentioned a church on the Yadkin Circuit from which about 20 members had gone.⁵⁰ That was the church of Solomon Long in northwest Forsyth County. It had been organized in 1852 by Joseph Parker and still exists as Pleasant Hill. In 1880 Long was president of the Deep River Conference and continued in that position through 1883, when he was living at New Hope in north Iredell County, the home of Eli McHargue.⁵¹ By 1885 he was still a member of the conference but resided at his home, with a postoffice address of Bethania. Other leaders mentioned in Methodist Church 1866 records and Methodist Protestant records are S. A. and J. B. Cecil from north Davidson County near High Point, representatives from the East North Carolina Conference to the General Conference of the Methodist Church in 1875. Ike I. York and A. E. Holton, son of Quinton Holton, had been elected to go to the uniting convention of 1877, but like the delegates from the Western North Carolina Conference, they did not go. In 1877 York and J. B. Cecil were fraternal messengers from the Deep River Conference to the North Carolina Conference, and in 1879 York joined the North Carolina Conference, one of the first Deep River ministers to do so.⁵²

In 1882 another Deep River minister, M. C. Hammer, came into the North Carolina Conference, bringing with him a High Point Circuit from Deep River.⁵³ A list of Deep River ministers in 1883 places A. C. Cooper on the Alamance Circuit, Haywood Holmes on the Randolph Circuit, F. C. Robbins on the High Point Circuit, A. S. Robbins on the Carraway Circuit, W. R. Smith on the Iredell Circuit, and A. J. Webster on the Pina Woods Circuit. Other ministers on the list, without appointments, were Q. Holton at Dobson, R. E. Holton at Homersville, James Houser at Farmington, Nathan Robbins at Freeman's Mill, and Benjamin

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 610.

⁵⁰NCMP, Vol. III, pp. 36f.

⁵¹Drinkhouse, Vol. II, pp. 537, 634; *Methodist Protestant Yearbook*, 1883, p. 41.

⁵²Drinkhouse, Vol. II, pp. 538, 555; NCMP, Vol. III, p. 430.

⁵³NCMP, Vol. III, pp. 117-18.

Weisner at New Hope in Iredell County.⁵⁴

Another list in 1885 names the three Robbinses, Solomon Long, W. R. Smith, J. A. Webster, Haywood Holmes, Benjamin Weisner, and Eli McHargue, secretary. All of these were from the old Deep River Conference. Also listed were several from near and across the mountains — R. R. Brookshier from Marion, L. M. Nolen from Lenoir, John and B. S. Clark from Haywood County, A. J. Beezley from Brevard, Simon Forbes from Bakersville, Isaac Justice from Edneyville, J. W. Terry from Asheville, and William Tinsley from Hendersonville.⁵⁵ The remnants of the old Allegheny Conference had by then merged with the Deep River Conference and in the last years of its existence the conference spread from Randolph County on the east to Brevard and Haywood County on the west, its ministers and churches widely scattered. It was just a little stronger numerically than the old Deep River Conference, with 678 members and nine churches.⁵⁶

Disintegration of Deep River Conference

Attempts at a merger between the North Carolina Conference and the Deep River Conference continued. At the conference of 1884 R. H. Wills, the president of the North Carolina Conference, announced that, "Conferring with Rev. Brookshier I learned he wished this Conference to take some steps by which a union could be effected. The plan proposed by him was to divide the Conference, when the Deep River Conference could affiliate with the Western Division. That conference met in Marion last week, and it may be they will send some communication to this. If anything could be done it would be well, but I have no suggestion to make."⁵⁷ If any communication came from the Deep River Conference it did not find its way into the record. Besides, the price they were asking was too high. The North Carolina Conference would not divide again.

At the conference of 1887, as another General Conference was being planned, "A resolution regarding the boundaries of the Deep River Conference and to memorialize the General Conference to fix the same, was laid on the table." And later "the resolution of J. R. Ball in reference to the status of the Deep River Conference was read and discussed and the whole matter was referred to the North Carolina delegation to the General Conference with full power to act in behalf of the Conference."⁵⁸

When the annual conference met in the fall after the General Conference in 1888, a half-hearted move was made to merge the two

⁵⁴*Methodist Protestant Yearbook*, 1883, p. 41.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 1885, p. 49.

⁵⁶Drinkhouse, Vol. II, p. 620. The membership in 1888 is listed at 500.

⁵⁷NCMP, Vol. IV, p. 223.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 342, 351.

conferences. The president and three members of the former Deep River Conference were constituted a committee "to have charge of all matters pertaining to the relation of those people to this conference."⁵⁹ The only thing to come of that move was to set up Thompson's Chapel, Rain Hill, and North Cove as the McDowell Mission and send W. W. Holloway to serve it.⁶⁰ The next year the president reported that success was so small in that section that it would hardly pay to continue it.

The Deep River Conference was never merged with the parent conference.⁶¹ Instead it simply disintegrated. None of the 1885 list of Deep River ministers show up in the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church. In 1891, however, the president, W. A. Bunch, was able to announce that "the divisions which grew out of the war troubles and which culminated in the organization of two annual conferences within our borders have finally succumbed to the inevitable. The wounds produced by the said rupture as viewed through the youthful lens of this body must be regarded as a dead issue." In the same address he complained of proselyters bent on destroying the North Carolina District of the Methodist Protestant Church.⁶²

The final break-up of the Deep River Conference can best be seen in north Iredell County, where at least four of the churches went into the Blue Ridge Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church about 1890. As the Methodist Church 1866 was being organized in 1867 among the Methodist Protestant churches in that section, missionaries of the Methodist Episcopal churches were making progress in Wilkes and Yadkin counties to the north among the churches of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, with at least two congregations in the extreme northern part of Iredell involved.⁶³

In the last part of the 1880s an evangelistic minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Adolphus J. (Dolly) Johnson, persuaded the Deep River churches in north Iredell to join the Blue Ridge Conference of his church. The first one to make the move was Friendship, which had been organized in the 1850s by a group of Harmons and Rhynes who had moved into the section from Lincoln County.

Three deeds recorded in Iredell tell something of the story. In 1869 an 1858 deed made by Absolom Rhyne to Friendship Methodist Protestant Church was recorded.⁶⁴ This was one of three deeds recorded

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 372.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 372, 388.

⁶¹The General Conference of 1888 ordered the Deep River Conference stricken from the list. *Minutes of the General Conference*, 1888, p. 51.

⁶²NCMP, Vol. V, pp. 61-62, 64.

⁶³Barker's, long since abandoned, in northwest Iredell and Wesley Chapel, still in existence, in northeast Iredell.

⁶⁴Iredell County Deeds, Book 4, p. 69.

that year in Iredell County to Methodist Protestant churches, likely through the exertions of W. H. Wills, president of the conference, in an effort to stave off the churches being taken over by the Methodist Church 1866. The two other deeds were for Union Grove and Gethsemine.⁶⁵

Then, in 1886, T. W. Harmon made a quit claim deed for the same property to the trustees of the Methodist Church at Friendship in the Deep River Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church.⁶⁶ And later, in 1890, L. R. Harmon and his wife, Mary Harmon, made still another deed to the same property to "the trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Iredell County, for the use and benefits of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America."⁶⁷

The North Carolina Conference was not ignorant of what was going on. In 1888 it appointed C. A. Pickens as its legal representative "to look after the legal title of certain property in Iredell County formerly known as Old Friendship Church and to report to the next session of conference."⁶⁸ And as late as 1894 a committee appointed to investigate certain property in Iredell County reported:

After having examined all the papers we are of the opinion, from the evidence before us that the legal title to the property in Friendship is properly in the trustees of the Methodist Protestant Church; but owing to complications and personal feelings that are better known and appreciated by our church in the immediate section: We, therefore, recommend that the whole matter be referred to the quarterly conference of the Mocksville Circuit to take such action in the premises as they think best.⁶⁹

Soon after Friendship's action in 1890, a deed was made to the Methodist Episcopal Church for Fairmont Church near Turnersburg, although a deed had been made in 1860 to the same property to the Methodist Protestant Church.⁷⁰ It was 1899 before a deed was made to the Methodist Episcopal Church for Sandy Ridge near Friendship.⁷¹ Sandy Ridge was a second phase of Eli McHargue's Mt. Carmel and the place where Frank Templeton said the last meeting of the Deep River Conference was held in 1891.

Union Grove was another story. In 1890 J. C. Patterson, "who was requested by the last conference to look after the Iredell property, performed that duty in the early part of the year, and Union Grove in Iredell County was reclaimed and attached to the Mocksville Circuit."⁷² The Craters and the Whites chose to return to the mother conference, while

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, Book 4, pp. 30, 324.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, Book 12, pp. 335-36.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, Book 15, p. 228.

⁶⁸NCMP, Vol. IV, p. 367.

⁶⁹*Journal of the North Carolina Conference, Methodist Protestant Church*, 1894, pp. 17-18.

⁷⁰Iredell County Deeds, Book 49, p. 425.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, Book 25, p. 251.

⁷²NCMP, Vol. V, p. 14.

others chose to join the Blue Ridge Conference. They withdrew and organized Smith Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church. The tradition is that they first threatened to build a new church just on the other side of the cemetery from Union Grove but reconsidered and moved a mile or so to the west.

Two other Methodist Episcopal churches in Iredell seem to have their roots in the old Deep River Conference. A. J. Johnson, with considerable help from Eli McHargue, organized in 1891 Mountain View Methodist Episcopal Church out of those who had once been members of Chestnut Grove Methodist Episcopal Church, South.⁷³

The newspaper at the county seat, the *Statesville Landmark*, insisted on calling Mountain View a Methodist Protestant church. At Harmony Hill camp meeting in the northeastern part of the county, a union camp ground of the Methodist Protestants and the Baptists, there had been traditionally a Methodist Protestant church during the Civil War and later. By the time that the other churches were going into the Blue Ridge Conference it had died down. But when the academy town of Harmony sprang up there in the 1890s and wanted a church, it was the ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church who met their need.

Over the western part of the state how many Deep River Conference churches followed the lead of the Iredell County churches and joined the Blue Ridge Conference is a question that will have to be worked out a church at a time when histories are written. In neighboring Alexander County, Pleasant Grove Methodist Protestant Church near Stony Point did move to the South Yadkin River and become South River Methodist Episcopal Church in 1894.⁷⁴ Undoubtedly there were others throughout the western part of the state.

⁷³Iredell County Deeds, Book 27, p. 505.

⁷⁴R. F. Sharpe, "South River Church History." Typewritten copy in Western North Carolina Conference Archives, Charlotte, N.C. See also Pen Lile Pittard, *Prologue — A History of Alexander County* (N.p., n.d.), p. 25.