

THE YOUNG JOHN WESLEY— A NEW MONUMENT

By James R. Webb, Jr.

A new monument to John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was dedicated Sunday, August 3, 1969 in Savannah, Georgia. It stands within a few yards of the site of Wesley's house and garden during his sojourn in America.

The monument, nine feet in height, consists of a bronze likeness of the young John. It is mounted atop a pedestal of Royal Pearl granite. The whole structure rises eighteen feet above a brick patio, with four granite benches in the corners. Inscribed on the front of the pedestal are the words, "John Wesley, 1703-1791, Founder of Methodism, Minister of the Church of England in Savannah, 1736-1737." On the back of the pedestal is the inscription, "Wesley lived, loved, and labored here, as God led him toward higher dedication and a larger ministry. Erected by the Methodists of Georgia and the citizens of Savannah in 1969. Marshall Daugherty, Sculptor." Quotations from Wesley are used on the other two sides of the pedestal. On one side, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. While we live, let us live in earnest. I look upon all the world as my parish. The best of all is, God is with us," and on the other side, "My heart's desire for this place is not that it be a famous or a rich, but that it may be a religious, colony; and then, I am sure, it cannot faile of the blessings of God." The monument stands in Reynolds Square in downtown Savannah, on Abercorn Street not far from the Savannah River.

The figure is that of Wesley at about thirty-three years, his age when he came to Georgia. It represents him in a preaching pose, with his right hand extended in exhortation and invitation and his left holding the Bible. The facial resemblance was created by the sculptor from prints of some of the earliest extant paintings of John Wesley. One of these was brought to Georgia, for the sculptor's use, by Bishop John Owen Smith, presiding bishop of the Atlanta Area, following the 1966 session of the World Methodist Conference in London.

The monument is a joint project of the Methodists in the state of Georgia. Offerings were received in the churches of the South Georgia Conference, the North Georgia Conference, and the Georgia Conference. A number of individuals of other denominations and some of the historical societies of the state made generous contributions. The total cost of the monument was approximately \$60,000.

At the dedication ceremony on August 3, Bishop John Owen Smith gave the main address on "The Greatness of John Wesley." The Prayer of Invocation was offered by Bishop Albert R. Stuart,

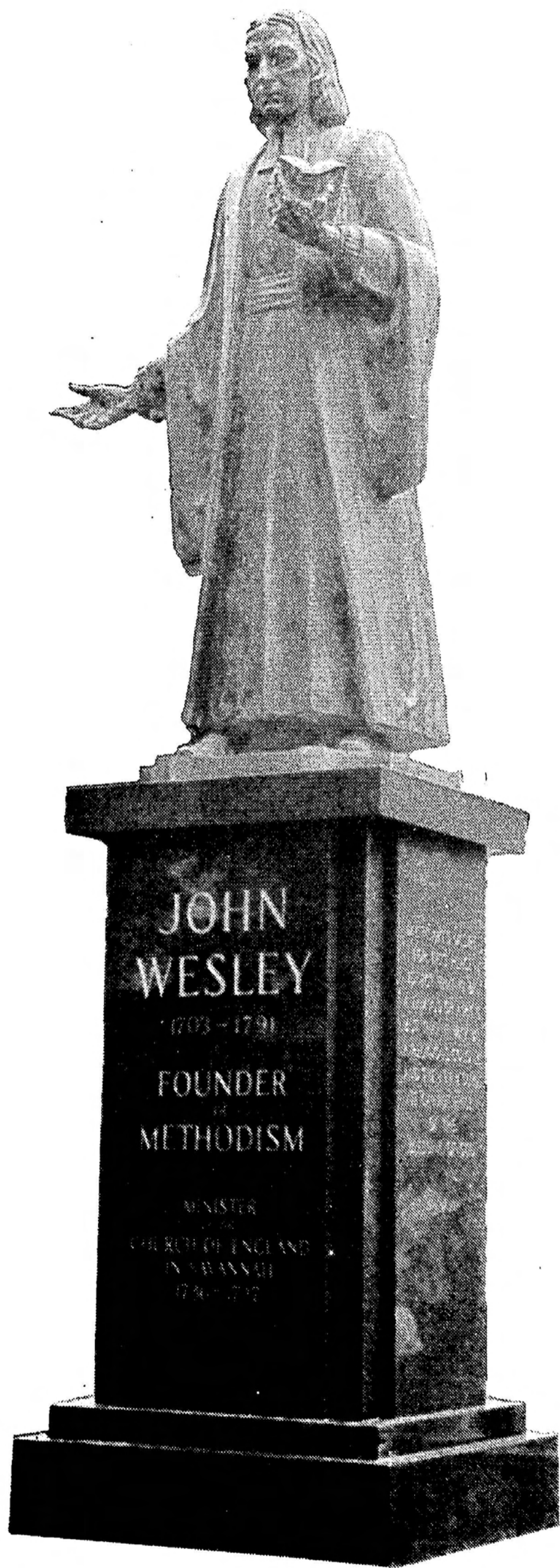
presiding officer of the Diocese of Georgia of the Protestant Episcopal Church. The North Georgia Conference was represented by the Rev. Eugene Carroll, state director of Methodist Information, and the Georgia Conference by the Rev. Harold Gray, superintendent of the Savannah District for that conference. The Rev. C. E. Steele, South Georgia Conference district superintendent for the Savannah area, gave the prayer of dedication. Others on the program included J. Curtis Lewis, mayor of Savannah, Judge Alex A. Lawrence, and the executive secretary emeritus of the United Methodist Commission on Archives and History, Dr. Albea Godbold, who came from headquarters at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina to represent the Commission at the dedication ceremony. The sculptor, Marshall Daugherty, gave a brief interpretation of his work. Mr. Daugherty is the head of the Art Department at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, and is the son of a former superintendent of the Methodist Children's Home in that city.

For many years fire trucks in the City of Savannah, on their way to extinguish various blazes, rushed pell mell through the center of the Reynolds Square where the Wesley statue now dominates the scene. City officials closed the fire lane when the statue was erected on the square. The monument stands just east of the plot of ground where Wesley had his residence, along with the garden where he courted Sophy Hopkey in the romance which played a significant role in his Georgia visit.

The erection of the monument brings to consummation a dream which had been entertained in the minds of many persons for many years. As far back as 1872, a Savannah newspaper carried a notice to the effect that "the John Wesley Monument Committee had just completed another meeting." When Silas Johnson was president of Wesleyan College in Macon many years ago, he asked a local sculptor to create a likeness of Wesley in clay from which a monument could be made. Significantly, the man asked to make the clay model was the very person selected in 1965 by the committee to be the monument's sculptor.

In 1965 two Episcopalian laymen (Alex A. Lawrence and Malcolm Bell, Jr.) of Savannah, Tom A. Whiting, then pastor of Wesley Monumental Methodist Church in that city, and the writer of this article (then district superintendent in Savannah) met for a luncheon to discuss the feasibility of the erection of a monument to John Wesley in Savannah. Later, after all the Methodist pastors in Savannah had approved the idea, the South Georgia Conference adopted the project and promised its support. Subsequently the other two Georgia annual conferences joined in the effort, and a statewide committee was formed to carry out the endeavor.

The new monument is the first one of any kind to be erected in Savannah since the year 1910, and the first ever constructed to



JOHN
WESLEY

1703-1791

FOUNDER
OF
METHODISM

MINISTER
OF
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
IN WASSAU
1741-1752

honor a religious leader. In 1910 a monument to General James Oglethorpe, founder of the Colony of Georgia, was erected in one of the city squares. That monument was fashioned by the celebrated sculptor, Daniel Chester French. Other squares in Savannah contain memorials to General Casimir Pulaski, Confederate soldier, and other persons.

On his arrival in Georgia in February, 1736, John Wesley landed on Cockspur Island, near the mouth of the Savannah River. That spot is marked by a stone pillar but there is no statuary. The Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church in Savannah is a memorial to both John and Charles Wesley. It was named in their honor and carries portraits of them in stained glass in its windows. Money for the erection of that church was raised by wide public subscription, and a ministerial emissary even traveled to England and Europe to obtain funds.

So far as this writer knows, the monument to John Wesley which was unveiled in Reynolds Square, Savannah, last August is the first piece of statuary to be erected in honor of the founder of Methodism in the state of Georgia. There is an equestrian statue of Wesley on the campus of Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D. C., and another of him, erected in the last few years, on the campus of West Virginia Wesleyan College, Buckhannon, West Virginia. Possibly there are still other statues of Wesley in America of which this writer is not aware. Only the Savannah statue, however, has the distinction of resting on the very ground in America on which Wesley himself once walked.

It is hoped that many readers of this article and hosts of others will find occasion in the years ahead to visit Savannah and see for themselves Methodism's newest major monument to her founder.