



## DISCOVERY

Edited by  
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### **Bishop Asbury Was Human After All**

No one will deny Francis Asbury's preeminence as the founding leader of American Methodism. It is refreshing to hear that at least in the eyes of some of his contemporaries he was quite human. Never have I read Asbury's strengths and weaknesses more clearly described and explained than they were by Nathan Bangs (1778–1862). Bangs himself was one of the leaders of early Methodism and well acquainted with Asbury. To establish Bangs' own place in Methodist beginnings, he was an early pioneer in western Canadian Methodism although he was an American. He brought Methodism into Quebec and then into the vicinity of Detroit. In 1806 Bangs returned to the United States and continued as a circuit preacher. In 1820 this self-educated preacher became the Book Agent for the Methodist Episcopal Church, remaining in the post for 20 years.

Recently while working with a fragment of Bangs' unpublished Journal for 1812–1817 I discovered this note in which he describes Asbury as a leader and as a person. It should be added to our understanding of the Bishop and his place in the history of the United Methodist Church.

May 1<sup>st</sup> 1816. Our General Conference convened in the City of Baltimore. Previous to this, tidings of the death of Bishop Asbury reached us. In the death of this great and good man, the American Methodist have lost not only a tried friend, and faithful Bishop, but also an affectionate Father. It is true, he had his spots and blemishes, which from his elevated station in the Church, were the more visible. If, at any time he manifested a partiality to his favourites, and an indifference to the sufferings of individuals, those failings may find an apology in the common frailties of humanity, and in his determination to make every thing subserve the gener-

al good of the Church. To accomplish this object, the interest of individuals must be frequently sacrificed,—If a love of power may be justly attributed to him, we may safely conclude that it originated from a conviction of his ability to use it for the best of purposes viz. To the general diffusion of Christian knowledge. If he manifested an aversion to scientific attainments among the Preachers, it doubtless arose from a fear that it is extremely difficult to combine knowledge and a pious zeal together; probably concluding that the latter is more essential to a Gospel ministry than the former. His continual desire to keep the ministry poor, may be accounted for, from an apprehension that riches are dangerous auxiliaries to aid the minister in the discharge of his duty; and if he had approved of measures to insure a competency to men of heavy and expensive families his name would have been transmitted to posterity with a juster claim as a Father to the fatherless. Having no family of his own to provide for, he could not enter into the paternal feelings; and hence neither the intreaties [sic] nor tears of suffering fathers, could, always, move him to plan his measures, in the distant and oppressive removals of Preachers from place to place. Accustomed to make continual and great sacrifices himself for the sake of Christ, he thought, perhaps incorrectly that others, whatever their circumstances, ought to do the same. But his unbounded thirst for the salvation of souls, arising from a penetrating sense of God's immense love, and their lost and ruined state by nature and practice, his genuine and deep experience of the religion of Jesus Christ, his many virtues, his great powers of mind, his extensive knowledge, his comprehensive view of subjects, his penetrating genius, and his skill in managing and governing so complicated a machinery as is the Methodist economy, secured to him the confidence of his brethren, and the respect of all were honoured with his acquaintance.