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The purpose of Part I of this research (essentially the first five chapters) was to chart out and describe the arrival and development of the Methodist faith in Rockingham County, North Carolina. The origins of Methodism in England, America, and Rockingham County are examined and correlations denoted. The travels of Bishop Francis Asbury into Rockingham County, the influx of Methodists from Delmarva and Virginia into the area, the organization and administration of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the two significant divisions within the M.E. Church in 1828 and 1844 are studied in detail. The simplicity of "Wesley-Asbury" Methodism in America was reflected by the church architecture prior to the Civil War. The Civil War temporarily halted and diminished the growing strength of Methodism in Rockingham County. The Methodist forces were left in unstable financial and spiritual condition.

Part II (the final four chapters) deals with the revival of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (the dominant branch of white Methodism) and its move into the county's towns, the slow development of the Methodist Protestant Church as a basically rural denomination and the rise and rebirth of the Methodist Episcopal Church as an outlet for black Methodists. Part II demonstrates how Methodism became dominated by the wealthy white Anglo-Saxon Protestants who discarded much of the "Asbury Austerity" features in worship and architecture and guided Methodism into the mainstream of American

Protestantism. The unification of the three major branches of Methodism in 1939 had little overall effect in Rockingham County. The white urban Methodists continued to dominate the New Methodist Church as they had since the development of the "New South."

THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF METHODISM IN
ROCKINGHAM COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA;
FROM ASBURY TO THE
UNIFICATION OF 1939

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

People did not want to become Methodists because they hoped thereby to secure social, political or economic advancement. On the contrary, it was unpopular to be a Methodist... Methodism made progress in America because it was not hampered by traditions, by creedal tests or by racial ties. It could work with all classes of people and with all nationalities... The Methodists endeavored to spread scriptural holiness rather than theology over America...¹

This conclusion by the eminent Methodist historian and church leader Paul N. Garber some sixty years ago stressed the existence of American Methodism at the juncture of social change and religious consciousness. Methodism was more than an evangelical movement in the annals of American religious history. Garber expounded upon the premise, which forms the essential argument of this thesis, that American Methodism evolved from a rural-dominated religious sect into a powerful national denomination with its actual strength in the urban areas. Methodism existed in a state between social advocacy and evangelical awareness in that its supporters tried to appeal to a great number of people with varying backgrounds. Originally, the "poor people's church," Methodism developed from its humble origins in England in the eighteenth century to become the largest religious group in America by 1850. By the twentieth century Methodism represented a cross-section

of society - the bastion of which was the upper class. How and why this change in Southern American Methodism within a century of time is an important aspect of this thesis which focuses upon Rockingham County, North Carolina.

This thesis is a study of a national phenomenon from the perspectives of the local church and of the social history of rural and small town Southern America from the late eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries. The social transformation through which Methodists passed, therefore, requires close attention and study. The need for such studies of the local church has never existed as great before.

The study of church history has seldom attracted the interest of the professional or novice historian. Moreover, church history has been grossly ignored by genealogists of all levels as if church records could not reveal important facts and details relative to one's family history. The church, as one of our last remaining essential societal links with our past, is an important bond within the American South today. Few institutions have withstood the ravages of time to becoming a pivotal force in the Southern culture. The church is often the barometer of public opinion and oftentimes presents the best and the worst characteristics in human nature.

The past twenty years has witnessed a change in the study of religious history, primarily the development of social history. Historians have gradually recognized church history as an important aspect of Southern society - a bond that links most societal levels together. Regardless of one's position in society, the church was one institution for which people had strong emotional opinions - either pro or con. How religion became a unifying element in the democratic American society is demonstrated by Nathan O. Hatch in The Democratization of American Christianity (1989). Authors who take this view with added dimensions for the American South include Donald Mathews in Slavery and Methodism (1965) and Religion in the Old South (1977), which explores the biracial element in American Christianity, and Ted Ownby in Subduing Satan (1990), in which the strong relationship between the local church and the typical Southern home are studied. Class, Conflict and Consensus: Antebellum Southern Community Studies (1982) continues this theme in viewing the church as a pivotal denominator in both the Southern home and culture. Robert Calhoon, in "An Agrarian and Evangelical Culture" (The North Carolina Experience, 1984) alludes to the Southern church as a form of "social bonding" among peoples - the democratic premise that salvation was freely accessible to all. Though Varieties of Southern Religious Experience (1988) does not stress this common bond that religion played in Southern society, it does expound the church as a factor in what makes the American

South a distinct region. Nevertheless, only in recent years have historians sought to examine the root of all religious history - the local church and community of which it serves.

That the local church has eluded research by America's leading religious historians is indicative of the cold indifference with which historians have regarded the study and preservation of local history. Church historians who researched and wrote denominational histories seldom, if ever, probed the very foundation of their subjects which was indeed the local church. This problem, while predominant among American academia, existed within the individual congregations as well. Local church historians did not express any interest in researching and preserving records and traditions of their respective congregations. Even today local church history consists mainly of pastoral appointments, names of congregational leaders among the laity and significant dates in the church's past. Documentation of what is regarded as "church history" is of little concern to the average "historian" in the local congregation. Inaccuracies, once in print and in memory, become such "solid fact" in congregational histories that not even the most indisputable evidence to the contrary is able to dislodge them. Such feelings of infallibility among local church historians would appear related to the provincialism that exists throughout the southern United States. The Methodist Church in Rockingham County is certainly a case study of these observations.

The so-called "Golden Age" of Methodism in Rockingham County exists in the form of two movements occurring between the American Revolution and the Great Depression. The first movement lasted from the Revolution to just prior to the Civil War while the second wave occurred during the six decades following the Civil War. The second movement culminated with the unification of the three major branches of American Methodism in 1939. These two waves of development were strikingly different in focus; the first one concentrated upon rural church growth in the rural and small village areas while the second wave was primarily urban coupled with the rise of the "New South." The first wave, approximately 1770s-1850s, was the epitome of the Wesleyan tradition, as fashioned by Francis Asbury and combined elements of austerity, simplicity, and a devout religious fervor. Following the Civil War, Methodism in Rockingham County, as well as in the rest of the South, underwent a significant change. The focal point of church development centered upon the urban areas, thus requiring a more highly organized church program and the substantial financial resources to support them. The development of Rockingham County Methodism is one of a primitive religious sect, becoming a denomination of great influence and wealth which was the antithesis of the Wesleyan tradition.

The initial wave of church development in Rockingham County was characterized by several processes. The visits to Rockingham County by Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury and

other leaders of the church during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were a great boost to the small and determined bands of Methodists in the area. The healthy environment of the northern Piedmont of North Carolina prompted the settling of the area by former residents of the Delmarva Peninsula and south central Virginia during the generation following the Revolution. These migrations led to the founding of the county's oldest and leading congregations of the Methodist faith. The camp meeting era occurred at this time and gave added life to the spread of local Methodism throughout the southern United States. Rockingham County benefited greatly from the camp meetings for they became the means by which the church entered the county's towns and villages for the very first time. The style of architecture for Methodist churches during the antebellum years was significant in that church design was the symbol of austerity and modesty that was a basic element of the Wesleyan tradition. Antebellum church design in Rockingham County reflected that sentiment and flourished in the rural areas in which the first wave of development was centered. The advent of the Civil War found Methodism in Rockingham County somewhat divided over issues of church administration, but basically in accord with the essentials of the Wesley and Asbury premises.

The Civil War served as the watershed for the development of the church in the county and announced the beginning of a new age in Methodism. Whereas the primary focus of the

previous century had been on the rural areas and villages, the power base behind the success of this second wave of development was in the towns and cities. The poverty and spiritual indifference that pervaded the South in the aftermath of the war convinced Methodists that a revival was desperately needed. The protracted meetings, the latter-day successor to the camp meetings, provided the forum in which souls were saved and religious fervor was restored. A new age of revivalism had been born within Methodism, but in addition the auxiliary ministries reached maturity within the local church. The auxiliary ministries (i.e. Sunday Schools, women's societies, youth groups, and music ministries) could only thrive in areas in which there existed large active congregations with substantial financial resources. Therefore, the urban areas became the bastion for the success of these extended ministries of the local church. The birth of the "New South" helped bring the growth of the urban church and the auxiliary ministries into maturity. During this time period the blacks became a pivotal power force within local Methodism. Previously under the direct control and ever watchful eye of the whites, the blacks, following the war, suddenly found themselves free not only from bondage but also from an established church. Northern missionaries came into the conquered South and assisted blacks in organizing their own Methodist congregations. Unlike the whites, the blacks organized their first churches in the towns and villages in

the county. This growth of the urban church dominated the styles in church architecture of the late Victorian era. Fine and impressive buildings and programs made the church dependent upon the wealthy against whom Asbury had cautioned his followers. Thus, the second wave of church development was indeed the antithesis of the traditional "Asbury austerity."

These two seemingly unrelated, but connected, movements culminated with the unification of American Methodism in the spring of 1939. Three major branches of the church were merged into the Methodist Church: the Methodist Episcopal Church (commonly known as "Northern Methodists"), the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (also known as "Southern Methodists") and the Methodist Protestant Church. All three branches existed in varying numbers in Rockingham County though it was the "Southern Methodists" who exerted the overwhelming influence in the area. The 1939 "unification" actually continued the racial segregation that had existed in Southern Methodism since the end of the Civil War. Racial equality had not yet arrived in the Methodist Church and would not for many years to come. It would be the upper class urban whites who would continue to dominate local church affairs in the Methodist Church. True, Methodism had become immersed into the mainstream of American Protestantism, but many of the basic traditions that Wesley and Asbury expounded upon were jettisoned and such was certainly the case in Rockingham County.

In preparing a historical account of local Methodism the historian, either professional or amateur, is often bewildered by the dearth of adequate information. This shortage of both primary and secondary sources is rooted in the tradition that Methodists are basically indifferent to their heritage. Methodists have seldom made a concerted effort to produce and maintain records. Moreover, published accounts of "church history" have seldom been more than cursory narratives that describe events and activities of regional or national importance. In essence the local church, the very foundation of the church universal, has been woefully neglected by past and present historians - though some advancement in the recent preservation of local church history has been made. The indifference of Methodists relative to church history knows no racial or professional lines. The crux of this thesis, that Methodism evolved from a primitive, rural and needy origin to that of elaborate, wealthy and urbane characteristics, is not entirely of recent vintage.

There has been comparatively few exhaustive studies on American Methodism beyond the traditional narrative. William W. Sweet, in Methodism in American History (1933) and The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War, provides interesting reading, but his overwhelming bias toward Northern Methodists plus the passage of years diminishes the value of his works to one researching Southern Methodism.

A History of Methodism, by Holland N. McTyeire, is significant in several respects: it was one of the first detailed accounts of Methodist history in America (1885), McTyeire was a bishop in the Southern Methodist Church, and he stressed the "mutual" division of Episcopal Methodism into Northern and Southern factions in 1844-45. However, McTyeire's work, as Sweet's, is very much outdated. There have been few recently published studies on the Methodist Protestant Church and the two-volume The History of Methodist Reform and the Methodist Protestant Church (1899) by Edward Drinkhouse remains the most extensive account of the denomination in America.

More recent studies in American Methodism have provided contemporary views oftentimes not considered by earlier historians. The History of American Methodism (1964) by Emory Stevens Bucke is perhaps the most extensive study of the topic to date. Bucke's collection is enlightening, for he demonstrates the connection between anti-Federalist sentiment in America with schisms in Methodism over the episcopal oligarchy. Frederick A. Norwood in The Story of American Methodism (1974) explains the necessity of Methodism's complexed system of administrative hierarchy for numerous geographic areas in the nation. The evolution of Methodism from a religious sect under the authority of John Wesley to a formally organized national denomination under the control of Francis Asbury is explained in detail by Frank Baker in From Wesley to Asbury: Studies in Early American Methodism

(1976). Together these three works express recent trends in revised Methodist history for all expound upon the struggles of early American Methodism as it competed with and fell victim, at times, to the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian Democracy that pervaded the agrarian South of the early nineteenth century.

Studies on Southern Methodism in the United States have seldom strayed from the traditional narrative path in which the local church is often neglected. William Larkin Duren in The Trail of the Circuit Rider (1936) presented the first detailed study of the Southern Methodists since the 1880s and emphasized the advancements made by the church following the Civil War as the denomination strived for urban domination - a theme of this thesis. The Circuit Rider Dismounts: A Social History of Southern Methodism 1865-1900 (1938) by Hunter Farish resembles Duren's work structurally speaking but, unlike Duren, totally ignores the role of the local church and the shift of Methodism from rural to urban domination during the nineteenth century. Francis B. Simkins in "White Methodism in South Carolina During Reconstruction" (1928), explores the problems facing white Methodists in South Carolina which were identical to those facing the church in her northern sister state: the threat of Northern missionaries, the ecclesiastical status of post-war blacks and the moral and social indifference the church faced following the war. "A Southern Advocate of Methodist Unification in 1865" (1941) by Nora Chaffin recalls the deplorable state of the Southern

churches following the war and the attempts by North Carolinian Braxton Craven, a most vociferous minister, to achieve a "premature" unification of Southern and Northern Methodists. While these regional studies are few, outdated and seldom analytical a constant theme is indeed detectable - the need for revival within the local church after 1865 and the advancements made by Methodists during the late nineteenth century as the church expanded its role in the local community.

Only during the last few decades has the Southern church begun to receive the attention it has long eluded. One of the few religious historians who studies the successes and problems of the local church and morality in the antebellum South is Donald Mathews in Religion in the Old South (1977) in which he plots the downfall of the local church in enforcing morality within its congregations. Such inability on the part of the local church indicated a transformation of evangelicalism as the family unit replaced the church as the local enforcer of moral codes. This was especially true on the plantations owned by Methodist families as we shall see in Rockingham County as Christian commitment of servants (slaves) was essential. Unlike the Baptists, for example, the Methodists became increasingly passive and tolerant during the nineteenth century and seldom resorted to disciplinary actions by the local congregations.

During the twentieth century, a variety of published works on specialized interests and topics relative to

Southern church history have materialized. Regarding the role of blacks in the local Methodist Church, however, little research has been done. One of the earliest volumes on black American Methodism was The Negro in the Methodist Church (1951) by Mason Crum, a leading Southern liberal of the day. Despite Crum's obvious patronizing of blacks, he stresses that the blacks' espousal of the Christian faith as the wisest move they ever made in America for it lifted them up as well as weakened the hands of their oppressors. A more recent view of black Methodists is provided by Donald Mathews in Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality 1780-1845 (1965) and it is Mathews who settles the argument over which issue directly divided the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844-45 - slavery. Yet, Mathews devotes little attention to the actual division of the church in 1844-45 and the subsequent formation of the Southern Methodist Church (Methodist Episcopal Church, South) and totally ignores all aspects of localism. While not a history of blacks in American religion, Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery (1979) by Leon Litwack provides a poignant view of newly freed blacks who face their spiritual future with uncertainty and a lack of direction. Their ultimate success, sometimes with the aid and encouragement of local whites, is one of Methodism's brightest stories. Still, the need for a thorough and documented history of black Methodism constitutes perhaps the greatest void in literature in Methodist history.

The role of the ministries of the local church in American Methodism has seldom received adequate treatment by historians. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the church made great advances in auxiliary ministries and charitable works. William McGuire King's "The Role of Auxiliary Ministries in Late Nineteenth Century Methodism" (1985) provides a general, though brief, overview of the various programs within the church, such as women's societies, youth groups (such as the Epworth League), missionary societies and Sunday Schools. King's article demonstrates the efforts of local Methodism in trying to provide entertainment as well as spiritual renewal for church members and the community-at-large alike. Mission work has always played an integral role in the life of the Methodist Church. Though outdated and long out-of-print The Junaluska Conference (1913), a compilation of reports delivered at the second General Missionary Conference for the Southern Methodists in 1913, provides perhaps the most in-depth look at world-wide missionary work sponsored by the Southern churches. The History of the Methodist Protestant Children's Home (1935) by Mabel W. Russell describes the origins and development of that denomination's only home for children which was located in North Carolina. Ted Ownby presents a refreshingly new study of activities within the local Southern congregation - an important part in Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation and Manhood in the Rural South 1865-1920 (1990). His theme in part is that the church

"provided its members with a social world of recreation in a sacred or almost-sacred setting." ² In essence, the expansion of the church's role in the daily lives of its parishioners, coupled with the post-war wave of revivalism, brought new life into the body of American Methodism during the late 1800s.

The antebellum Methodist Church in Southern America perhaps came the closest to what Wesley and Asbury would have deemed "true Methodism." The antebellum years were characterized by the camp meeting movement, simplistic architectural design of churches, the element of democracy within congregations, and the division of the church over administrative and sectional issues. The Frontier Camp Meeting (1955) by Charles A. Johnson is a readable, yet detailed, account of a touchstone of Methodism - the camp meeting which was greatly supported and encouraged by Francis Asbury. Paul N. Garber describes one of the most interesting features of antebellum Methodism which was church architecture in The Methodist Meeting House (1941) in which he bridges the simple design of churches with the democratic, though anti-Catholic, sentiment that was so evident in the Methodist congregations and clergy. The theme of democracy in the church is skillfully expressed by Nathan O. Hatch in The Democratization of American Christianity (1989), in which he remarks that Methodism "faced the... paradox of gaining phenomenal influence among lay persons with whom

it would not share ecclesiastical authority." ³ Hatch's view contrasts deeply with those of Paul Garber in that the latter constantly stressed the lack of any barriers whatsoever between laity and clergy. There indeed was a barrier between the two parties in Episcopal Methodism as the subsequent formation of the Methodist Protestant Church would prove. The divisions and schisms within American Methodism are explained in C. C. Goen, Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War (1985), in which the author cites the Methodist Episcopal Church as "the most extensive national institution in Antebellum America other than the Federal Government." ⁴ Recent scholarship is providing, though in somewhat small amounts, a clearer view of the theme of democracy as it existed within the church during the antebellum period.

It is the writings of Bishop Paul N. Garber, however, that bridge the span between simple narrative and social history. In the Romance of American Methodism (1931) Garber alludes to the democratic element in American Methodism and the denomination's ability to appeal to all classes of people. In The Methodists Are One People (1939), published on the eve of Methodist unification, Garber continues that theme though many churchmen would not agree to his premise that there existed no barrier between Methodist ministers and the laity. While the passage of time has made many of these publications obsolete these, and other works, form the foundation for contemporary research in Methodist history.

The rise of American Methodism in the eastern United States has eluded extensive study which is especially unfortunate for it was that area that the denomination achieved its first successes. The author of The Garden of American Methodism: The Delmarva Peninsula (1769-1820) (1984), William Henry Williams, attempts to fill that great void. While Williams does not champion one historical or ideological viewpoint he does a most creditable job in telling the story of the development of Methodism in the mid-Atlantic area. Indeed, Williams states, "because local is often universal" a close perception of Methodism's character in the Delmarva region is reflected elsewhere in early America. Since a considerable portion of early Rockingham County Methodists came from Delmarva Williams' monograph is certainly well worth reading and absorbing.

One of the most important aspects of Methodism concerns the administrative and ecclesiastical structure that has existed in some form ever since the inception of the denomination. Unfortunately, there are few, if any, recent works available for the historian to consult in understanding the structure of the early church. Consequently, out-of-print or outdated volumes must be consulted for understanding the positions among the laity and clergy that existed within the church during the nineteenth century. For the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for example, The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, issued

by the church periodically, is an invaluable source of information and A Catechism on Church Government (1879) by Bishop H. N. McTyeire is another example of instruction for the laity. While these volumes are basically instructional in nature they provide a foundation for further understanding the complex system of ecclesiastical and lay authority.

Hilary T. Hudson, The Methodist Armor, (revised periodically after 1882) not only provides a view of Methodist hierarchy and structure but also brings understanding to the doctrines and traditions of the church. Two works by Bishop Nolan B. Harmon provide details surrounding the 1939 unification and subsequent progress of the Methodist Church: The Organization of the Methodist Church (1953) and Understanding the Methodist Church (1961). Harmon's writings reflect shades of The Methodist Armor, but unlike the latter stress the unity of Methodists in America rather than the diversities within the faith.

The observation that North Carolina Methodism "followed the classical movement from sectarian to churchly status, from a religion of the poor and the powerless to (one) ... of the well-to-do and powerful." formulates, to a large degree, the principal theme of this thesis.⁵ Yet, there have been very few studies of North Carolina Methodism that have gone beyond the realm of historical narrative. The first serious attempt to rectify that void was taken in 1976 with the publication of Methodism Alive in North Carolina, a collection

of articles by eminent historians that dealt with varying aspects of North Carolina Methodism. For the first time in recent years a publication dealing with this societal transition in state and local church history had been produced. Methodism Alive appeared exactly one hundred years after the first significant volume on North Carolina Methodism was issued - The Centennial of North Carolina Methodism (1876). The success of the Centennial volume and the obvious need for a more in-depth study of Tar Heel Methodism prompted W. L. Grissom to produce the first of a proposed multi-volumed work History of Methodism in North Carolina, from 1772 to the Present Time (1905). Grissom's work, which was terminated by his untimely death, was the first serious attempt in presenting the rise and initial development of Methodism in the state as a predominantly rural denomination. Over the next thirty years, however, few additional studies in North Carolina Methodism were produced. The only exceptions in this instance were the "Historical Papers of the Trinity College Historical Society," published periodically during the early twentieth century and the Historical Papers of the North Carolina Conference Historical Society and the Western North Carolina Conference Historical Society (1925). These two publications, while informative and dealing with varying aspects of Tar Heel Methodism, were largely narrative in form and in the case of the latter work especially, undocumented. With the coming of a new generation in North Carolina Methodism a change in historical scholarship was in the offing.

Beginning in 1939 and for the next fifty years thereafter the scope of Methodist Church history in North Carolina began to broaden. The History of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church (1939) by J. Elwood Carroll was significant not only because it was the first serious (published) effort in exploring the history of one particular branch of Methodism in North Carolina, but it was he who noted the direct connection between church polity and the national wave of democracy. Elmer T. Clark, Methodism in Western North Carolina (1966), while basically a narrative, was the first historical account of the area now comprising the Western North Carolina Conference in which Rockingham County is located. As with black Methodism on the national or regional level, the lack of adequate material on North Carolina black Methodism constitutes the most obvious dearth of published historical data. To Be Faithful to Our Heritage: A History of Black United Methodism in North Carolina (1980) by Linda Addo and James McCallum is a cursory account of the contributions of blacks to North Carolina Methodism that contains little data on the local rural church. Since black Methodists were stronger in urban areas there is where the focus of Addo's and McCallum's research rests. George W. Bumgarner, The Methodist Episcopal Church in North Carolina 1865-1939 (1990), is certainly the most detailed study of a particular branch of North Carolina Methodism. Bumgarner's approach is unique from previous histories - the entire book

is devoted exclusively to local churches in the three geographic regions in the state. Thus, the three branches of North Carolina Methodism have been the focus of published works with varying quantity of historical data.

While the majority of published works on North Carolina Methodism exists in the form of narrative "institutional" histories, a theme is consistent in most of them - though at times subliminally. Methodism in North Carolina originated as a primitive religious sect and developed over the next century-and-a-half to become a leading mainline denomination in American Protestantism - the Methodist Church.

There have been amazingly few specialized studies of North Carolina Methodism. This is certainly true in reference to the auxiliary ministries and special projects undertaken by the local churches. In addition to the role played by blacks, those of women in Methodism have certainly been overlooked and North Carolina is no exception to the case.

Fifty Years of Missionary Achievement: 1890-1940 - Historical Sketch of Woman's Missionary Society, Western North Carolina Conference (1940) is one of few accounts of the roles played by women in the local churches. While By My Spirit: The Story of Methodist Protestant Women in Mission 1879-1939 (1990) by Ethel W. Born is a national level volume, she devotes considerable attention to the activities of Methodist Protestant Women in North Carolina. The role played by local churches in charitable work has been covered in part by

histories of the Southern Methodist Children's Home in Winston-Salem and the Methodist Protestant Children's Home in High Point. Perhaps the most important auxiliary ministry of the church, the Sunday School, has not been the object of a historical study since W. M. Brabham in History of Sunday School Work in the North Carolina Conference (1925). The role of North Carolina Methodists in social movements has been largely disregarded by many historians. Daniel Jay Whitener in Prohibition in North Carolina 1715-1945 (1945) recalls the Methodists active campaign against alcohol which lasted until the twentieth century when the church became noticeably less vociferous against intemperance. This abating in anti-alcohol sentiment among Methodists would appear to be indicative of Methodism's final transition into the mainstream of American Protestantism. Preachers, Pedagogues and Politicians: The Evolution Controversy in North Carolina 1920-1927 (1966) by Willard Gatewood demonstrates the strenuous efforts of Methodists to stay clear of the Evolution controversy which exemplified the church's "lack of doctrinal consciousness." Yet, there remains no single volume dealing with the varied programs and ministries of the local Methodist Church in North Carolina.

There have been numerous studies on local Methodist churches in North Carolina over the last thirty years. These histories have ranged from simple and brief narratives to detailed and analytical studies. The vast majority of rural

churches in the state prompted Jesse M. Ormond of Duke University to write The Country Church in North Carolina (1931) in which he cites the excessive number of rural congregations in proportion to the total rural population, the heavy burden of pastors of multi-church circuits, the need of expanded physical facilities in rural churches, the cityward drift of rural people, and the power dominant urban church as characteristics of the church in twentieth century North Carolina. This thesis will cover all of these issues in some form and manner. Ormond's conclusions have been favored by later church historians who have expounded upon and expanded his original treatise.

The writings of North Carolinian Larry E. Tise have had a profound effect upon the study of local Methodist history in the state. The author of numerous local church histories and state-wide studies, Tise conveys a constant theme in many of his works, such as The Yadkin Melting Pot: Methodism and the Moravians in the Yadkin Valley 1750-1850 (1967), A House Not Made With Hands: Love's Methodist Church (Walkertown, N.C.) 1791-1966 (1966) and "The Churches" in the Winston-Salem in History Series (1976). Tise, the state's preeminent authority on local and state Methodism, alludes to the church's loss in vitality and concludes that "the Methodist Church has often contributed a strong positive influence on society, while at other times it has fallen into states of perversion, backwardness and extreme conservatism." ⁶ In few other places

is Tise's theory more applicable than in Rockingham County, North Carolina.

There have been some creditable volumes on local Methodist history in North Carolina. These studies, while narratives, bring the national or regional trends in American Protestantism to the local level. These, too, convey in part many of the ideas expressed by Tise and Ormand as they present the evolution of Methodism from primitive sect to recognized Protestant power bloc. Among the works that fall into this category are C. Franklin Grill, Methodism in the Upper Cape Fear Valley (1966) and Early Methodist Meetinghouses in Wake County (1979); Lloyd R. Bailey, History of the Methodist Church in the Toe River Valley (1986); J.M.M. Holden, Heartening Heritage on a Carolina Crescent (1989), dealing with extreme southeastern North Carolina; and J. Elwood Carroll, Amazing Grace (1990), which celebrates the centennial of Grace Methodist (Protestant) Church in Greensboro, North Carolina. These and other similar studies are prime examples of sound documented research that is finally becoming the norm among local church histories.

Ormand's theories and premises are echoed in local church histories for the Rockingham County area. The abundance of institutional histories for the area does not prevent Ormand's themes from recurring. The struggle of the rural church for existence, rural indifference to Sunday School and missions work, the cityward exodus from the country,

and the growth of the urban church at the expense of the country congregations are all apparent in Rockingham County churches. The "History of the Wentworth United Methodist Church 1836-1986" (1986) by Michael Perdue and the "History of Salem United Methodist Church 1799-1986" (1986) by Frances R. Brown are prime examples of rural or small town churches that fight for existence against the strength and numbers of the urban congregations. Ruffin's Methodist Heritage 1867-1989 (1989) and History of Ruffin Methodist Church (1968) stress the conservative and indifferent attitudes that existed in rural congregations concerning the expanded missions of the church. A Brief Historical Sketch of Fair Grove Methodist Protestant Church... (1931) by J. L. Trollinger remains the only detailed study of a Methodist Protestant Church in Rockingham County, but provides a glimpse of the strong sense of democracy that existed in non-Episcopal Methodist congregations in the South.

The "golden age" for the urban churches in Rockingham County was the years following the Civil War during which the "New South" emerged. These years were times of substantial church growth as urban congregations shed the antebellum simplicity of church architecture, developed additional programs and ministries, and became the dominant power bloc within local Methodism. Local histories that present this theme include: Michael Perdue, "History of the Leaksville United Methodist Church 1837-1987" (1987) and "History of the

Madison United Methodist Church 1843-1990" (1990); and J. O. Thomas, The Story of the Methodist Church, Leaksville, North Carolina (1957). Histories of non-Methodist congregations in Rockingham County that also present the urban-small town themes include "The History of the Madison Presbyterian Church" by Charles D. Rodenbough, Leaves of Faith: A History of First Baptist Church, Eden, North Carolina 1838-1989 (1989), and R. R. Saunders, Open Doors and Closed Windows: The History of First Baptist Church, Reidsville, North Carolina (1948).

Histories of Rockingham County provide an overall view of local church development. Our Proud Heritage: Rockingham County, North Carolina (1971) and Rockingham County: A Brief History (1982) by Lindley S. Butler are the only authoritative accounts of Rockingham County History now in print. Butler's works stress the fragmentation and isolation of communities and towns within Rockingham County which were great barriers to promoting county-wide denominational projects and events.

First-hand recollections of ministers and local residents in published form for Rockingham County are quite rare. The foremost account in this category for this area remains the Life, Sermons and Speeches of Rev. Numa F. Reid, D.D. (1874), edited by sons of the Rev. Numa F. Reid (1825-1873), the county's most noted Methodist leader. "The Diary of the Rev. Robah Fidus Bumpas (1876)" (1988) presents the struggle of the Southern Methodist minister who pastored the

overwhelming Wentworth Circuit in 1876 which covered all of eastern Rockingham County. Nancy Watkins, Four Blocks of Rockingham County Culture: Madison, North Carolina, Academy Street... 1818-1928 (c. 1950), presents a vivid view of late nineteenth century religion in a small Southern town complete with the conservative overtones of the day. Alberta Ratliffe Craig, "Old Wentworth Sketches" (1934) paints a poignant retrospective picture of life and society in the state's smallest county seat during the late 1800s in which the divisions between religious denominations were largely ignored - a theme recognized by Ted Ownby in Subduing Satan. These and other unpublished accounts present the conservative, "backward" and uncompromising attitudes shared by many Methodists and non-Methodists in predominantly rural Rockingham County.

In spite of the great void in analytical studies on North Carolina and Rockingham County Methodism, recurring themes are quite detectable within the local church that exist elsewhere in the South. First, the primitive sect status of early Methodism evolving into a major power bloc in American Protestantism exists as the main central theme. Under that main concept can be found: the eroding of the "Asbury Austerity" in worship and church architecture, the compromising by Methodists in the South as they condone slavery - one of the "original sins" within the concept of Methodism, Methodist accommodations toward wealth and

opulence during the late nineteenth century, and the waning of Methodist revivalism after the evangelistic successes of the nineteenth century. All of these sub-themes were basic to Southern Methodism as the unification of 1939 approached. Not even the blacks were immune to the problems besetting local Methodism and the unification did little to alleviate their individual concerns. No, contrary to Bishop Garber's premise, the Methodists were not "one people." Barriers existed within every level of the church: blacks versus whites, the episcopacy versus the laity, wealthy versus indigent, urban versus rural and so on "ad infinitum."

The history of Methodism in Rockingham County, while only fragmentary at best, alludes to these issues and others that faced a struggling religious sect in the former American Colonies following the War for American Independence which by the close of the Civil War had become America's leading denomination and remains among the leading religious institutions of the present day.

CHAPTER II

PRELUDE TO ROCKINGHAM COUNTY METHODISM

Arrival of Protestantism to Rockingham County

Much of the early history of Rockingham County is shrouded in mystery. Fragmentary evidence suggests that the earliest settling of whites in the area was along the Troublesome Creek valley in the southern half of present-day Rockingham County as early as the 1730s. Until 1770 what is now Rockingham was shared by Orange and Rowan counties, out of which was then formed Guilford County. Rockingham County, in turn, was created in December 1785 from the northern portion of Guilford. ¹

Just exactly when the first elements of Protestantism entered the county is not currently known. Presbyterian missionaries such as the noted Hugh McAden were holding services in the area as early as 1755. That same year the Hanover Presbytery was created to include Virginia and all colonial lands to the south. Increasingly more missionaries were dispatched to the primitive reaches of the Carolina backwoods. It is believed that some of these missionaries organized the first religious congregation in the area, Speedwell Presbyterian Church in 1759. Located near the waters of Troublesome Creek, southeast of present-day Reidsville, Speedwell is the mother church of Presbyterianism in Rockingham County.

Though the Presbyterians were apparently the first to organize in the county, their growth was slow and resulted in the existence of only two congregations by the 1830s. The Presbyterians would throughout their history in the area struggle to maintain pace with their more numerous brethren, the Baptists and Methodists. ²

Baptists established congregations in Rockingham County as early as the 1770s and took congregational names from the creeks on which they were located: Matrimony (1776), in the northwestern portion of the county; Wolf Island (1777), just northwest of Reidsville; and Lickfork (1786), a few miles south of Ruffin. All three churches continue in existence today. Baptists living along the southern and eastern boundaries of Rockingham County attended churches in Guilford and Caswell counties, respectively, for many years. The Baptists attained an early foothold in the area and have been able through the years to maintain their numerical superiority. ³

Initial development of Rockingham County was somewhat slow at first during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The vast majority of settlements were in the eastern half of the county, though by the end of the 1700s the county could only boast of two villages: Wentworth, the county seat established in 1787 as "Rockingham Courthouse;" and Leaksville, established in 1795 near the confluence of the Smith and Dan rivers. Leaksville, being a trade market

on the river, was able to become a thriving community. Wentworth, located in the center of the county, was positioned on a high ridge several miles from a navigable water source. As its location did not promote active trade, Wentworth became essentially the administrative center of the county - peaking in activity only during sessions of the county court. Throughout the nineteenth century the present-day towns in Rockingham County developed: Madison (1815), Reidsville (1873), Stoneville (1877), and Mayodan (1895). In practically each of these communities the Baptists, Presbyterians and eventually the Methodists were able to organize active and productive congregations.

Of the major Protestants to develop in Rockingham County during the eighteenth century, it was the Methodist Church that was the last to arrive. Contrary to common belief, the idea of Methodism was conceived not as an individual religious entity unto itself. Nothing could have been further from the mind of John Wesley who saw the great need of reform within the Church of England. Wesley merely saw Methodism as a means of promoting reform and change within an already well-established church system. The detailed origins of Wesleyan Methodism are beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, we will look at the basic concepts and events in the Methodist movement that had direct bearing on Rockingham County and similar areas in the southern United States.

Most historians trace the origins of Methodism to Wesley's famed attempt to minister to the Indians while a missionary in Georgia during the 1730s. To Wesley the journey to Georgia was a dismal failure, countered only by his brief association with Moravian missionaries whose strong faith in God made him question his own. Further contact with Moravians in England led Wesley to his conversion experience in 1738. Although he disagreed with the Moravians on several doctrinal issues, Wesley adapted numerous traditions of these Germanic brethren into the Methodist movement as will be seen later. ⁴

John Wesley, assisted by his prolific brother Charles - Methodism's greatest hymnist, organized several Oxford University leaders into a group of Anglican reformers known derogatorily by critics as "Methodists," due to the group's methodical practices. It must be stressed that Wesley only wished to reform, not secede from, the Church of England. It has been said that Wesley's beliefs and ideas "differed mainly in emphasis rather than in substance" from the Anglican Church. Methodism stressed the emotional rebirth of the soul as opposed to the deductive reasoning route to salvation that was espoused in the established church. Moreover, this reform movement advocated a "preaching" aspect that was not only lacking in the ceremonial-conscious Church of England, but was also suspect as well. Wesley's precepts

of freedom of choice, a God full of saving grace, and a society without class distinction appealed to those of the lower "unchurched" classes in England. Together, these Oxford reformists would spread the fires of Methodism all over England and beyond. ⁵

Methodism, in both theory and practice, was not popular within the mainstream of the Anglican Church. In many cases Methodists were denied the pulpits in Anglican churches on account of "theological ignorance" on the part of the former. Unable to preach in churches Methodists often turned toward open fields and public squares for assemblies. Such practices alarmed officials of the "high church," who never ceased in their criticisms and suspicions of the Wesleyans. As Methodist preachers were unordained, they could not administer the sacraments of the church and were forbidden by Wesley to do so. Wesley also stressed that activities of the Methodists were not to compete with those of the established church. In essence, Methodists were Anglicans in good faith, he claimed, and he was forever bewildered by the mistrust in which the Anglicans held Methodists. ⁶

As the Wesleyan movement took hold and spread like wildfire across England, plans were made to bring the crusade to America. In 1739 George Whitefield, the noted English evangelist and associate of John and Charles Wesley, arrived in America and formed what was called the first "Methodist" society in Delaware. Whitefield, during his career in the

colonies, visited North Carolina several times prior to the American Revolution. He was not, however, an emissary of Wesley in the colonies as has been alleged by early historians. It was not until 1769 that the first official missionaries of Wesley arrived in America and it was one of those two, Joseph Pilmoor, who is credited with delivering the first official Methodist sermon in North Carolina at Currituck Courthouse in 1772. Throughout the late 1760s and 1770s Methodist societies were being organized in the mid-Atlantic colonies in ever-increasing number. The area of most promise for Methodists was the Delmarva Peninsula which was named the "garden of American Methodism." Yet, until after the Revolution the development of Methodism was confined to areas close in proximity to the eastern seaboard and in areas in which the Anglican Church existed. ⁷

Methodism was still a basically unorganized movement in many respects when North Carolina was brought into the realm of the Wesleyans. There was no central overall conference in the colonies originally; what existed was a loose collection of individual preaching circuits. In 1773 the first meeting or conference of Methodists in the colonies was held in Philadelphia and when the conference reconvened the following year a portion of northeastern North Carolina was placed in the Petersburg (Virginia) Circuit. Two years later, in 1776, the conference created the Carolina Circuit

which was the first to lie entirely within the colony, though its exact limits are not known today. At the time of its creation the Carolina Circuit contained 683 Methodists and within the next year the figure stood at 940, making it the second largest circuit in the colonies. The growth of Methodist numbers in North Carolina was encouraging enough to call for the division of the state into three circuits: Roanoke, Tar River and New Hope, the last of which only extended as far west as Greensboro, approximately. The fact that no circuit covered the western half of the state did not deter circuit riders from going into the area now consisting of Surry, Stokes and Rockingham counties as early as 1776. In 1780, however, a new circuit, the Yadkin, was added to take in the remainder of the state. Within six short years North Carolina had come from an area not served by Methodist ministers to a state fully within the confines of not one, but four preaching circuits. ⁸

During the 1780s the four existing circuits in North Carolina were divided into several smaller units as membership numbers increased. The Yadkin Circuit was an early recipient of these divisions, for in 1783 two new circuits were formed from its midst. One of these two new circuits, the Guilford, took in all of Guilford, probably most of Randolph County, and perhaps some of the border areas in adjacent counties. Samuel Dudley and James Gibbons were the first ministers appointed to the Guilford Circuit in 1783.

Dudley and Gibbons were two of the nineteen Methodist ministers in North Carolina out of a total of seventy in the entire church. Methodism was clearly on the rise in North Carolina during the first years following the cessation of hostilities between the United States and Great Britain. Nearly one-fifth of the nation's fifteen thousand Methodists lived in North Carolina at the time of the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America in 1784. As the number of both members and circuits increased it became obvious that a formal organization of the Methodist societies in America was in order. ⁹

Formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church

The years of the American Revolution brought about a significant change within the whole emphasis of the Methodist movement. From the time of its inception Methodism had existed under the auspices of the Church of England. Such a close association led many colonists to view the followers of Wesley with less than an open mind. Wesley's well-known support of the monarchy in Britain led many to suspect American Methodists of Toryism. All but one English-born Methodist minister departed for the Mother Country once the Revolution erupted. That one minister was Francis Asbury who served as Wesley's "General Assistant" in America. It was Asbury who held the unorganized and tangled threads of Methodism together through those trying years. As the War

for American Independence was drawing to a close Asbury considered the ultimate outcome of Methodism. The Church of England in the colonies was for all intents and purposes dead. Would Methodism die an ignominious death alongside her Anglican mother, or would it have to assert itself as a separate religious entity? Asbury struggled within himself for the proper answer and course to take. Finally, he came to the conclusion that Methodism must become an organized denomination of its own. Wesley was most reluctant to accept this point of view, but he also realized that without the ordained Anglican clergy to administer sacraments to Methodists the movement would disintegrate and an independent denomination, free from Wesley's influence, would arise in America. ¹⁰

Faced with these alarming possibilities, Wesley had no other course to take but to allow for the organization of a "Methodist Church" in America. In September 1784 Wesley ordained fellow Anglican minister Thomas Coke, "Superintendent" of the Methodist societies in the United States. Upon arrival in the states Coke informed Asbury of Wesley's views concerning the organization of the new church. Asbury would give up his position as Wesley's General Assistant in order to serve as joint superintendent with Coke and possess the powers and privileges of a bishop. Asbury, now wanting to place distance between himself and Wesley, was lukewarm to the plan, accepting it only on the condition that he be

elected to the position of joint superintendent by the unanimous vote of the preachers in America. Asbury had no fear of losing such an election for he was clearly the undisputed leader of the American preachers. Clearly, he was letting Wesley know, in no uncertain terms, that from henceforth the directives of the latter "would no longer carry the force of law." ¹¹ Recent theories have suggested that Wesley allowed the American Methodists enough self-rule to survive until an American form of the Anglican Church could organize and resume overall control over the Wesleyan movement. Whatever the case, the day of Wesley's control over Methodists in America was over forever though he continued until his death in 1791 to act as the patriarchal leader of the movement. ¹²

The December 1784 "Christmas Conference" in Baltimore for Methodist preachers in America organized the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America, the first national religious organization in the nation to be thus established. Asbury and Coke were elected superintendents for the Methodist societies in the nation. Asbury later, on his own initiative, assumed the title of "bishop" for the denomination - another indication of his increasing independence of Wesley. The Christmas Conference approved the Articles of Religion which was Wesley's abridgement of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England and created a form of church discipline as a means of regulating all

Methodist societies. The Christmas Conference was essentially the birth of the General Conference or, in other words, the national association of Methodist ministers in America. In essence, Methodist preachers could now become ordained ministers and administer the sacraments of the church. Methodism had gone a full 180° from its original intended purpose; the reform movement had become an organized and functioning religious entity unto itself. ¹³

The Christmas Conference was not the limit of Asbury's distancing from Wesley. Asbury's backwoods experience had led him to reconsider the whole procedure of Methodist worship. Wesley came from an Anglican tradition, rich with formality and liturgy, and with a touch of the Moravian element added. Asbury found that such ceremonial aspects of Methodism were neither practical nor popular in the frontier areas. He instead opted for a more informal style of worship in which preaching was the main focus. Consequently, he eliminated the "churchly and liturgical" elements of Methodism that had been such an important part of the Wesleyan movement. From this point onward, American Methodism pursued a course of its own. ¹⁴

The name "Methodist Episcopal Church" has often been the cause of much misunderstanding by members of the laity. The term "Episcopal" implies no connection whatsoever with the American Protestant Episcopal Church - the phoenix that rose from the ashes of the Anglican Church. The term merely

implied the system of church government in Methodism. Under the episcopal form of government bishops, who were elected to office for life, presided over the conference on the national (general) and later the sub-conference (or annual) conference level. In the years before the annual conference concept was formally adopted, bishops of the General Conference made the appointments of ministers to the respective circuits. The fact that the Methodist Episcopal Church was controlled solely by ministers would be a thorn in the side of the denomination for nearly a century. 15

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century the General Conference was the only official form of organization above the local circuit or church level. The United States was composed of numerous preaching circuits, each pastored by one or two ministers. Clearly, there existed a need of a tighter organization within the church. In 1801 the district concept of church government was first implemented whereby several adjoining circuits were placed into districts presided over by an elder. These "Presiding Elders" served as intermediaries between the circuit riding minister and the bishop(s) and are known in the church today as district superintendents. In 1802 the annual conference concept was formally adopted whereby several districts within a geographic area were grouped together. The annual conference met, as the term implied, yearly at which time pastoral appointments to both the districts and circuits were made.

The annual conference was directly under the auspices of the General Conference, but was over the districts, circuits and individual churches, respectively, within its bounds. 16

These developments had impact upon Methodists in Rockingham County which remained a part of the Guilford Circuit even after the formation of the county from Guilford in 1785. Beginning in 1801 the Guilford, Salisbury and Yadkin circuits were placed in the newly created Salisbury District. The following year witnessed the formal creation of the Virginia Annual Conference which included most of Virginia and North Carolina. The Salisbury District (including the Guilford Circuit) was included within the bounds of the Virginia Conference. So by this time a five-level system of church hierarchy has developed within the Methodist Episcopal Church: the General Conference, the annual conference, the district, the multi-church circuit, and the individual church. It is interesting to note that the United Methodist Church still adheres to this system with the existence of a jurisdictional conference between the annual and General conferences. 17

Contrary to early religious historians, who researched and documented the history of the general conferences in detail at the expense of the individual churches, recent historians of the present day agree that the most important element or structure within the Methodist framework was the

class-meeting. The concept of the class-meeting can be directly traced back to John Wesley. In early Methodism in England each society (or congregation) was divided up into classes, or sub-groups, of some twelve to fifteen people each. The arrangement and purpose for the class-meeting was developed early within the Methodist Episcopal Church Discipline:

Each society is divided into smaller companies, called classes... There are about twelve persons in a class, one of whom is styled the leader. It is his duty:

- I. To see each person in his class, once a week, at least, in order
 1. To inquire how their souls prosper;
 2. To advise, reprove, comfort or exhort, as occasion may require;
 3. To receive what they are willing to give towards the relief of the preachers, church and poor.

- II. To meet the minister and the stewards of the society once a week in order
 1. To inform the minister of any that are sick or of any that walk disorderly, and will not be reprov'd;
 2. To pay to the stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding....¹⁸

Essentially, the class-meeting was a means in which members of the local congregation could draw spiritual strength and moral fibre. Codes within classes were strict; tickets were issued to members in good standing for admission to the lovefeasts. Members failing to correct themselves upon admonition by the class or its leader were liable for

expulsion from the class-meeting. The concept of the class-meeting eventually fell by the wayside in most Methodist congregations by the end of Reconstruction due to the success of the camp meeting, the rise of the Sunday School and the greater tolerance of human frailties. Nevertheless, the class-meeting helped to fill a great spiritual void inadequately countered by monthly or twice-monthly, at best, worship services. 19

In order to fully understand the complex administrative system that existed within the Methodist Episcopal Church it is necessary to look at the positions that existed on the local church level. Local church government was largely invested in the charge quarterly conference which was held either on the circuit level or in the case of a one-church charge (a rarity in the early days) the individual level. These quarterly meetings were held on a rotating basis among the numerous churches on the circuit approximately every three months. Usually, the district presiding elder would moderate the meetings with the circuit pastor and the local church officials presenting progress reports. At these meetings funds for the pastor and the presiding elder were collected along with any other circuit-wide expense. Preaching services were often a part of these quarterly meetings. The basic assemblage of local church officials consisted of the exhorter, class-leader (previously mentioned), the stewards, and the trustees. An exhorter was

one who read the scriptural lessons during worship services and made short practical applications and observations on said lesson to the congregation. Exhorters were licensed by the quarterly conference. Stewards regulated the financial affairs of the church by paying the expenses (namely, the pastor's salary) and by collecting the necessary amounts from the members of the congregation. Trustees were elected by the quarterly conference and in them were vested all church property. The trustees held the property in trust according to the church discipline. While other positions were created within the church during the nineteenth century it would be these four that would provide the essential leadership in all Methodist congregations. 20

Obviously, the most stressful position of authority in the church was that of minister. The itinerant system was a touchstone within the Methodist tradition. Both Wesley and Asbury argued against the evil of pastors locating as opposed to "riding the circuit." An apostolic form of the ministry was Asbury's point of focus. It was believed that ministers locating in towns and cities would quickly subject themselves to the vices of the wealthy and influential. As it was common for a single circuit to have as many as twenty congregations it was essential for the minister to be itinerant, and, during the early years of Methodism, unmarried. The labors were long and hard for the circuit rider; the itinerant system kept the church dominated by young men.

In fact, one historian claims that during the years prior to 1819 sixty percent of the circuit riders who died in active service were under the age of forty. ²¹

There is somewhat a romantic tradition associated with the average circuit rider. From appearances the dress of the rider was quite plain and austere. A low, broad-brimmed hat, frock coat, stiff collar, and the lack of jewelry of any kind were among the more common features. The traveling equipment of the typical circuit rider consisted of his "horse, saddle, and bridle; one suit of clothes, a watch, a pocket Bible, and a hymn-book. Anything more... would be an incumbrance." ²² Methodist historian William L. Duren made the following observation of the circuit rider which perpetuates the so-called romantic conception:

Whenever the settler's cabin to be found, thither the itinerant preacher made his way, there was heard the voice of those consecrated servants of the church, and there was the beginning of a Methodist circuit. The preacher shared the hospitality of the frontiersman, he left with them the treasures of his own experience, and he awakened in their minds and hearts the joys and the fellowship of his immortal hope. ²³

The task of the circuit pastor was clearly hard and grueling. Most of the early ministers in the service had little, if any, formal education. In fact, with the exception of Thomas Coke, there was not a college graduate in the Methodist ministry in America until 1818. Even so, Methodist preachers were "professional organizers sent out

to call churches into existence, not to wait for churches to call them." Gradually, as circuits were divided with the subsequent reduction in churches for the single pastor, the task of the circuit rider became more bearable and manageable. In reality there was little, if any, romanticism associated with the itinerant Methodist ministry. ²⁴

We have seen Methodism rise from its humble beginnings in England to becoming the first organized religious entity in the United States; let us now look at the rise and development of the church in Rockingham County, North Carolina.

CHAPTER III

EPISCOPAL METHODISM DEVELOPS IN ROCKINGHAM COUNTY

Within a period of roughly sixty years from the mid 1780s to the mid 1840s the Methodist Episcopal Church established a foothold in Rockingham County. These years constitute the "Golden Years" of Methodism in the county. By the end of the era nearly every section of the county possessed Methodist churches or societies of some kind. These are also the years of the camp meetings which played an integral part in the development of the Methodist church locally. It is also a time of trial as the Methodist Episcopal Church divides over first the episcopacy and second the issue of slavery. There were two distinct migrations of Methodists from the Delmarva Peninsula and Virginia, respectively, to Rockingham County where they established several of the county's leading congregations. Gradually, Methodists organized societies in the towns of the county - no longer would Methodism be solely a rural denomination.

Unfortunately, there exists no early records of Methodist churches in Rockingham County prior to 1808. Such an absence of records constitutes an almost impossible obstacle to overcome. "Methodists as a general rule are extremely unconscious of their heritage. Unlike Moravians and Quakers, Methodists have not shown any interest in the laborious task of keeping detailed records." ¹

Delmarva Methodists Settle in Rockingham County

The earliest accounts of Methodist activity in Rockingham County are found in the journals of Bishop Asbury, who visited Rockingham County several times during the latter portion of the eighteenth century. During these years Asbury visited the rural areas of North Carolina extensively, for it was in those areas that Methodism was the strongest. On Asbury's visit through North Carolina in March 1786 we note his first significant reference to the church in Rockingham County:

Wed. Mar. 1 (1786)- I found many waiting at Newman's (sic) Church, Rockingham County, to whom I enlarged on, "Christ our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." Provisions here are scarce; some of our friends from the Delaware are suffering. I arrived in the night at A. Arnett's; my being in a poor cottage did not prevent my being happy, for God was with me. ²

This passage in Asbury's journal is interesting in several aspects. He mentions the scarcity of food in the land following a severe winter and, more importantly, he notes the existence of several former residents of the "Delaware" area living in Rockingham County who play an important role in the development of the church as will be seen. Newnam's Church (cited in Asbury's journal as "Newman's") was located in present-day Reidsville; the journal passage of March 1, 1786 is the earliest reference

known of that congregation. On Asbury's twelfth visit to North Carolina in April 1787 he was accompanied by Bishop Coke and together they visited Rockingham County:

Sunday, (April) 15. (1787)- Rose after six o'clock and went to Newman's Church, where the Doctor (Coke) and myself both preached; the people were rather wild, and we were unwell. ³

For some years there has been a misunderstanding concerning Newnam's Church and its exact location. The class leader at Newnam's was Salathiel Newnam who settled in the present-day Reidsville area about 1785. Newnam was originally from Kent County, Delaware and was one of several members who came from the Delmarva Peninsula area. The deed to Newnam's property in the county leaves no question as to its location, which was on Little Troublesome Creek in present-day Reidsville. By 1788 the society was known as "Smith's Chapel" where Asbury visited that year and again in 1799. ⁴ It is the diary of Rev. James Meacham, who visited Smith's Chapel in January 1795, that removes any doubt that Smith's Chapel was the successor to Newnam's Church:

January 31, 1795- I preached at Smith's Chapel from Isa. 35:10. I had but little comfort in the labours of this day and am afully fear there was but little good done. Bro. Deanes excommunicated one man for immoral conduct, rode home with Bro. Newnam the (class) leader... ⁵

Meacham's diary reference to Smith's Chapel, therefore, states that Newnam is the leader of the class there, thus

eliminating any doubts concerning the relationship between Newnam's Church and Smith's Chapel. "Bro. Deanes" mentioned in the passage was the Rev. Daniel Dean who was the appointed pastor of the Guilford Circuit for 1795 and who also owned land in Rockingham County on the Haw River.

Smith's Chapel was formally organized in August 1800 with the purchase by the church trustees from William Martin a one-acre tract on Little Troublesome Creek. This property was without doubt in what is now Reidsville. The trustees of Smith's Chapel in 1800 were Charles Moore, James Philips, John Harris, William Carrico, Thomas Thompson, Gordon Smith, William Webster, William Jones and Levin Woollen. Research by Robert W. Carter, Jr. in the 1980s sheds new light on the identities of several of these trustees. Charles Moore and Thomas Thompson were Methodist ministers who came to Rockingham County from Dorchester County, Maryland in the 1790s. Levin Woollen was also from Dorchester County, moving to Rockingham County in 1795. William Jones was also originally from Maryland and like Thompson, Moore and Woollen came from a strong Methodist family. These families all resided in the area around present-day Reidsville. Little else is known regarding Smith's Chapel; the church appears periodically in the records of the Guilford Circuit before vanishing in 1834. Evidently, the congregation was the weakest of the three Methodist churches that were organized within a three-mile radius of Reidsville by 1800. 6

Another favorite stopping place of Bishop Asbury's on his visits to Rockingham County was the home of Isaac Lowe, a few miles southeast of Smith's Chapel. Lowe, who came to Rockingham County from Dorchester County, purchased land in the former county in 1784. In 1787 Asbury admitted Lowe on trial as a Methodist minister and in 1790 he ordained him as an elder in the church. By 1794 Rev. Lowe had constructed a meetinghouse on his property in southeastern Rockingham County. ⁷ Meacham was a guest of "old Brother Lowe" during the winter of 1795 and entered the following passage in his diary on January 21, 1795:

I preached at Bro. Lowe's meetinghouse and felt the Lord precious to my poor soul. Bro. Dean concluded with prayer and Exhortation. This class is in a low state, yet very expressious an enlargement of heart, for a deeper work of grace. We are now at old Bro. Lowe's who is very ill and is now making his last will and testement, in which he enfranchise's and sets free his poor slaves if ever the law of his state will admit of it. ⁸

This passage of Meacham's, too, is quite informative. This is the first reference to the existence of Lowe's meetinghouse which was built by Isaac Lowe who retired from the itinerant ministry in 1795 and assumed "location" status. Usually, when a minister "located" it was due to either old age and sickness or marriage. This fact is confirmed in Meacham's diary where he refers to Bro. Lowe as "an old laborer in the work but thro debilitation of body

declines traveling for the present." Lowe was one of few Methodist ministers to own slaves though he was not allowed under North Carolina law to free them. ⁹

On March 25, 1796 Rev. Isaac Lowe deeded one acre of land, on which his meetinghouse stood, to John Pearson, William Jones, Jr., Thomas Thompson, George Dilworth, John Lewis, and Daniel Deanes (Dean) who were the trustees of the Lowe's congregation. The Pearson, Jones, and Thompson families came from Maryland to North Carolina, settling in southeastern Rockingham County. Asbury preached to a large congregation at Lowe's in October 1799 - his last recorded visit to the county. Rev. Lowe lived until 1807 and is believed buried near the present Lowe's United Methodist Church, the modern-day successor of the original Lowe's meetinghouse. Lowe's is the county's oldest Methodist congregation and ranks among the oldest Methodist congregations in Piedmont North Carolina. ¹⁰

The last of the Delmarva Peninsula-related congregations to organize in Rockingham County was Salem Church in January 1799, some two miles northwest of present-day Reidsville. The first trustees of Salem were Edward Woolen, Absalem Goosetree, Joseph Asbridge, Henry Kilman and Patrick Wardlow, of whom Woolen and Goosetree were from Dorchester County, Maryland and Asbridge and Wardlow were also from the Maryland area. The majority of the Salem leaders lived along Wolf Island Creek near the church. It is not known that Asbury

ever visited the Salem congregation, but it can be assumed that his visits to the area certainly encouraged those at Salem to organize a society. Salem would develop into a strong congregation, closing only when the Methodists in nearby Reidsville organized their own church there in 1874. ¹¹

Thus the three Methodist societies within a three-mile radius of present-day Reidsville between 1785-1800 were to a significant degree organized by former residents of the Delmarva Peninsula area. Local historians have long debated as to why these Methodists migrated to Rockingham County. While no one and conclusive answer has been found to that question, a series of probable scenarios might adequately solve the puzzle. In his excellent in-depth study of Methodism in the Delmarva Peninsula, historian William H. Williams devotes considerable detail to the migration of Methodists from the peninsula area during the last decades of the eighteenth century. Williams attributes the "exodus" from the area to soil exhaustion after a century's hard use, a general decline in local economic vitality, the menace of the dreaded yellow fever and ague, and the resurgence of religious indifference and oppression. The peninsula area had been a hotbed for Methodist activity and opposition, especially during the years of the Revolution when ministers and members alike had been viewed with suspicion. ¹² The prospects of good, healthy and inexpensive land in the

foothills of North Carolina must have appealed to these weary people. Henry Thompson, son of the Rev. Thomas Thompson - an early Methodist minister who migrated to Rockingham County from Maryland - expressed in a poem thoughts shared by many Methodists in Delmarva:

Beyond the rolling Chesapeake,
 A hundred miles from Baltimore,
 Close by the place where Fishing Creek
 Begins to form the winding shore;...

A tender Father then I had,
 Who looked upon my face with joy,
 And pressed me to his bosom glad,
 And said I was his "little boy!"...

But lo when seven years had fell,
 My father lifted up his hand,
 And brought me far away to dwell,
 In Carolina's happy land.

Where better health abounds and hills,
 Of greater height their summits show,
 And down the vales more limpid rills
 From purer springs of water flow. 13

While many of the "Delmarva" Methodists moved to points further south and west of Rockingham County, their influence remains today in the existing churches of Lowe's and Salem. A lesser known meetinghouse east of Reidsville was organized in 1805 by Revs. Thomas Thompson and Charles Moore. The meetinghouse was known as "Hayse's," and was the forerunner of the Penile Church organized at the same site in the Lawsonville community in 1838 and now extinct. 14

Thus it would seem apparent that Methodists in Delmarva migrated south and west for reasons including and in addition

to religion. Not only had these new arrivals been exposed to religious persecution, but they were constantly faced with poor health and living conditions in the disease-ridden flatlands of Delmarva. Moreover, the land in North Carolina, while not abundantly rich, was a vast improvement over the exhausted and barren tidewater soil. In a great sense the Delmarva settlers were pilgrims in their own land. They came to North Carolina to begin life anew and fresh where good health and religious toleration were abundant. Methodist congregations were organized by these new arrivals during the latter portion of the eighteenth century and with that development Methodism had become a reality in Rockingham County.

The Town Creek Methodists

Another, though less significant, migration of Methodists to Rockingham County was from Prince Edward and Amelia counties in Virginia and the surrounding area in the early 1800s. A considerable portion of these settlers appeared to be related either by blood or by marriage. Among these related families were the Ellingtons, Guerrants, Tuckers, and Moores, all of whom settled along Town Creek in the present-day Mount Carmel and Bethlehem communities. While the migration of Methodists from the Delmarva Peninsula is more detectable and for more obvious reasons, it would appear that the Virginia migration was more of a family-oriented move. In the years following the Revolution, a

number of residents from the Prince Edward-Amelia area left the region for points south and west in the search for richer land. The first one of these Virginians to settle in the Town Creek area appears to have been Daniel Ellington, Sr. of Prince Edward County who arrived in Rockingham County in 1801. Daniel Ellington, Sr. was progenitor of all the Ellingtons in Rockingham County and many of his descendants played active roles in Methodist congregations all over the county. 15

By 1808 enough Methodists had settled in the Town Creek area to organize a society near the waters of Quaqua Creek in the present-day Oregon Hill community. The society was named (Mount) Carmel and the congregation there developed into the leading Methodist church in northeast Rockingham County for nearly a century. The society at Carmel was obviously organized by 1808, the date of the earliest membership roll. The recently discovered Carmel class papers lists the earliest members of Carmel Church and is the oldest known local Methodist Church record relative to Rockingham County. The nineteen original members were:

Pleasant Ellington	Alcey Ruffin
Sarah Ellington	Sterling Ruffin
Ira Ellis	Elizabeth Thomas
Mary Ellis	Mary Thomas
Susanna Jones	Nancy Tucker
Dolly McKinzie	Polly Tucker
Rhoda McKinzie	Sally Tucker
Jeremiah Mize	Lydia Whalebone
James Robinson	Tom ("a man of color") 16

The earliest deed for the Mount Carmel Church is dated September 1, 1813 when John Morehead, the father of North Carolina Governor John M. Morehead, sold two acres on Quaqua Creek to the church trustees: Sterling Ruffin, Ira Ellis James Robinson, Thomas Porter Guerrant, Charles Russell, Paschal Ellington and Frederick Wells. At the time of the 1813 sale a meetinghouse had already been built on the site. Among the early leaders of Mount Carmel were Rev. Ira Ellis and Rev. George R. Edwards, ministers who had "located" in the Carmel community, and Thomas Porter Guerrant, a local pastor. Throughout the nineteenth century Mount Carmel would play an integral part in the development of Methodism in Rockingham County. ¹⁷

Little is known about Methodism in the Town Creek area again until the mid 1830s when the Guilford Circuit Quarterly Conference on August 12, 1835 appointed a committee to oversee the construction of a church "near Dr. (Edward T.) Broadnax's in Rockingham County." The three men appointed to the committee were active in the Mount Carmel Church: Lloyd Waters, Rev. Benton Field, a minister in the Virginia Conference who had located in Rockingham County due to ill health; and Peter D. Guerrant, later a local Methodist pastor. ¹⁸ In September 1835 Waters sold a lot near Town Creek, a few miles southeast of Leaksville, to a newly elected board of trustees that included both Field and Guerrant. A frame church was quickly constructed on the

site and was named "Bethlehem," from the Hebrew meaning "House of Bread." In time Bethlehem developed into a thriving congregation of inter-related families, a status it maintains to this very day. Bethlehem was clearly the daughter of Mount Carmel and a number of the members of the latter congregation transferred to the former. ¹⁹

Members from both Bethlehem and Mount Carmel were instrumental in organizing a society in Leaksville during the late 1830s. Meeting in the local brick academy, the society at Leaksville was small and barely able to exist. The arrival of the Rev. Benton Field and family to Leaksville in 1840 heralded a new day for the small band of Methodists there. The Leaksville society was reorganized and the classes therein were revived to do more active service. Although the Leaksville Church claims an organization date of 1837, no documentation of that date has surfaced. It would seem safe to say, however, that the Methodists in Leaksville were the second to organize a church in the town, following the Baptists who established their congregation in 1839. The society at Leaksville remained small for a town church and it was not until 1859-60 that it was able to build its own sanctuary, which had to be shared with the local Masons who aided in its construction.²⁰

The organization of the Leaksville Church in circa 1840 ended the small wave of "Virginian Methodism" that began for unknown reasons on Town Creek some four decades previous.

While not as widespread and unusual as the Delmarva migration, the Virginia Methodists were able to establish three strong churches that remain active today. From these churches came many of the county's leaders in Methodism on the local and conference levels.

The Camp Meeting Era 1800-1860

Perhaps the most significant and interesting chapter in Methodist history surrounds the camp meeting era which developed Nationally from approximately 1800-1830, but continued in Rockingham County for at least an additional thirty years. The camp meeting era is significant to Rockingham County Methodism for several reasons. First, it brought the Methodist Church to new areas in the county. Second, it was the first time in which the Methodists were able to establish congregations in the county's towns. Third, the camp meeting movement led to the organizing or strengthening of the county's leading churches in the denomination.

The origins of the camp meeting movement in the United States are obscure at best and often the point of disputes. Early historians once claimed that the movement was born in North Carolina, but such belief has lost considerable support in recent years. Charles Johnson's in-depth study of the early camp meetings in America expresses that:

The origins of the camp meeting, which seemed to have appeared on the American frontier full blown in 1800 as the most striking manifestation

of the Great Revival (or Second Great Awakening), have long been hid in obscurity. ... One day the frontier was a godless place with little islands of workers in the Lord, and the next it was all aflame with religious zeal.... Nevertheless there was ample precedent for the separate features of the true camp meeting as it was practiced on the mobile frontier for half a century. The outdoor meeting had held a place in Methodist technique ever since the founding of that society. John Wesley was preaching outdoors in England as early as 1739.... The origin of the camp meeting, then, is not so complex and miraculous as it has seemed to be Its component parts are to be found in earlier secular and religious practices. The improvising genius of the frontier's dedicated preachers put various formerly-used techniques together and developed a new popular religious device of great power. That the final touches of this process of improvisation were accomplished in the course of one summer is the miracle and measure of that improvising genius. In the year 1800 the camp meeting sprang into being, was almost instantly universalized along the southwestern frontier, and almost as rapidly standardized into a pattern. ²¹

Other historians believe that camp meetings had existed in America before 1800. Elmer T. Clark, eminent Methodist historian, noted that Rev. John McGee held a camp meeting in Lincoln County, North Carolina as early as 1790. This was followed by several additional camp meetings in the western half of the state prior to 1800. Whatever the case, the camp meeting movement spread all over the eastern half of the nation during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. ²²

Especially in the South the early campgrounds were largely in cleared areas near the meetinghouses. The types of encampments varied greatly from place to place. The two most popular styles of settings for camp meetings in the

Piedmont region of North Carolina were the immortalized "brush arbor" and the open-air encirclement pattern. The brush arbor style was introduced to North Carolina soon after 1800 and consisted of an overhead shelter composed of brush, limbs and branches. Under the shelter were plain and crude benches for the congregation which was segregated according to sex during the early days of Methodism. Tents and shelters for those who remained on the campground during the week(s) of the meeting were placed nearby. The open-air encirclement pattern was composed of circular streets of tents arranged according to the topography. These tents formed the outer shell of the encirclements within which was the seating area for the congregation as well as the pulpit. Both of these styles are believed to have existed in Rockingham County during the first half of the nineteenth century. 23

The camp meeting concept found early favor with Methodists. One of the most vocal proponents of the idea was Bishop Asbury himself who remarked in 1809: "We must attend to camp-meetings. They make our harvest times..." It is even conceivable that Wesley, himself, would have approved the basic premise of the camp meeting, but he would not have approved of the overpowering emotional demonstrations that often accompanied such meetings. Moreover, Wesley warned against ministers raising their voices during preaching above the natural pitch. The lack of formality at camp meetings would have been distasteful to the founder of

Methodism, but even he would not have been able to deny the fact that such activities as the camp meeting were successful recruitment instruments. 24

Just when the first camp meeting was held in Rockingham County or its location are unknown. It is not until the 1830s or later that the first-hand accounts of camp meetings in Rockingham County are available. Traditions in both the Lowe's and Mount Carmel churches of each being early camp meeting sites would appear to be well-founded. One of the county's greatest camp meetings was held at Mount Carmel in 1843 as recalled by the Rev. John W. Lewis, whose wife's family was active in that church:

This camp meeting was in the pastoral charge of the sainted John Rich; Rev. Samuel S. Bryant was the Presiding Elder. There were a great many preachers in attendance at this meeting, and all of them seemed to be filled with the power of the Holy Ghost. On the first evening, at the first service, Divine power came upon the congregation. Christians got happy, and sinners were awakened. The work went on, increasing from day to day... The work of awakening and conversion continued to increase among the people, until it was ascertained that more than one hundred and fifty souls had been happily converted to God. ...The revival flame spread all around... Rockingham ... (til) it reached the church at Lowe's Chapel, near Thompsonville and many precious souls were converted there, and gathered into the church. 25

Among those who were converted at the Mount Carmel camp meeting were Numa Fletcher Reid, a schoolteacher from the Lowe's Church community, and his pupil James H. Brent - both having too brief, but distinguished, careers in the Methodist ministry in North Carolina.

Another early camp meeting site in Rockingham County was at Sharon Church north of present-day Ruffin. There existed a meetinghouse at Sharon as early as 1818 when the church trustees purchased the property on which it stood from James Rawley. Sharon was also a daughter of the Mount Carmel Church as its first trustees were mostly members of the latter congregation; namely, Sterling Ruffin, Rev. George R. Edwards, and Thomas Porter Guerrant. Among the early members of the Sharon congregation were those of the Fitzgerald family of Caswell County. A member of that family, Oscar Penn Fitzgerald (1829-1911), attended Sharon as a child and remembered the campground there where "the preaching, the singing, the praying, and the other exercises were of the liveliest kind." Young Fitzgerald entered the Methodist ministry and missionary service, becoming a bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1890. Sharon remained an active congregation until after 1849 when Methodists in the area joined with the Baptists and Presbyterians in establishing Union Church in the Mayfield community. Union Church was used by Methodists, Presbyterians and the Missionary and Primitive Baptists, with each denomination holding services there one Sunday out of the month. Sharon and Union churches would be the forerunners of the Ruffin Church organized in 1871. 26

The camp meetings were especially effective in bringing the Methodist Church to the villages in Rockingham County.

The churches at Wentworth, Leaksville and Madison were clearly results of camp meeting activities. Methodism was brought to Wentworth, for the first recorded time, in 1804 when the noted evangelist and radical Jeffersonian Lorenzo "Crazy" Dow preached to fifteen hundred people in the freezing temperatures and falling snow for over two hours. References to "Wentworth Meetinghouse" appear in county records as early as 1815 and eventually a campground was established at the site which was two miles east of the courthouse near the present intersection of N.C. Highway 87 and old Highway 87. The Wentworth Campground was often the location for sessions of the Guilford Circuit Quarterly Conference. In 1836 Methodist leaders in the area formally organized a church in the village at Wentworth and constructed a small frame meetinghouse west of the courthouse. In 1859 the Wentworth Church constructed a larger frame meetinghouse on the western end of the town. The church sanctuary was restored in the 1980s and remains as the county's last surviving antebellum Methodist edifice. Among the early leaders in the Wentworth Church was Robert Martin, Jr., whose daughter Martha was the first wife of Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois. 27

Leaksville, the second oldest settlement in Rockingham County, was also the location of one of the county's largest campgrounds. The origins of this campground are vague. It was located about one mile north of Leaksville on Tackett's

Branch in the Spray section of present-day Eden. The campground site was owned by the Barnett family, among the area's early industrialists. In addition to serving as a place for worship, the campground was also used for the sale of produce and other necessities until the early 1900s. Tradition relates that the Leaksville campground had a brush arbor and crude log slabs for seats. ²⁸ The Rev. Daniel E. Field, son of Rev. Benton Field and a local Methodist pastor in Leaksville, recalled a Methodist camp meeting there as being a "revival of religion ... conducted by the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists united and hundreds were converted. The great center of attraction... was a ... minister named Maffett, an Irish silver-tongued orator who swayed the people like straws before the wind." ²⁹ Meetings at the Leaksville campground led to indoor services at the local academy building and the organization of the Leaksville Church by 1840.

The Madison Church, organized in 1843, was the result of camp meetings several miles north of town. The formation of this congregation signalled the end of the initial development of Methodism in the county. Miss Nancy Watkins (1884-1966), Madison historian and a member of a leading Methodist family, recalled the traditional story of how the camp meeting led to the creation of the Madison Church:

From the first regional history, camp meetings on the Petersburg-Moravian Road at flood line south

of Mayo Falls, were held every summer on the land of Archibald Watkins, (Miss Watkins' ancestor)... The camp meeting lasted six weeks or more. Herein the spiritual brotherhoods were started which worked out into the Baptist and Methodist churches By 1830 this Mayo Falls Watkins family had all moved into Madison and occupied homes on Murphy and Decatur streets....Before the (Methodist) church was ready for services a revival was being held in the old log schoolhouse and meetinghouse (in town)... It was summer and up came a tremendous cloud which scared people into remaining at home. (The Watkins) family sent its carriage all around town and carried all to the revival meeting who wanted to go. The cloud broke into torrents of rain and wind. There were over a dozen conversions in the old schoolhouse during the storm. Thus the churches got started, in Madison on Academy Street. 30

Methodism was still enjoying sound growth in Rockingham County when the Madison Church was organized on January 9, 1843 with the trustees' purchase of a lot on Academy Street. On the site was erected a frame meetinghouse which was used by the congregation until 1909. 31

Undocumented tradition also relates camp meetings were held in several other places in western Rockingham County. The Methodist movement was clearly less productive in this portion of the county, as the majority of the churches were in the area east of the Dan River. The first congregation on the west side of the Dan was the Wesley Chapel congregation, founded in 1825 in the present-day Settle's Bridge community between Wentworth and Stoneville. In the 1830s a society known as "Clarksbury" existed in the Paw Paw Creek area of northwestern Rockingham County, but did not mature into a strong congregation. By the 1840s churches at

Leaksville and Madison were organized and in 1860 Grogansville Church was formed a few miles north of Stoneville. By 1860, however, only four congregations existed with reasonable strength on the west side of the river: Leaksville, Madison, Wesley Chapel and Grogansville. Camp meetings certainly played an important, if not total role in the creation of these churches. ³²

An interesting note worth consideration is that in the only two villages in the county in which the Methodists were the first to organize churches: Wentworth and Madison - both were the results of camp meetings. Thus the influence of the camp meeting was not totally rural in nature as some historians have suspected, but instead both town and country benefited from such activities.

While camp meetings began on the wane nationally by the 1830s, they continued in popularity in Rockingham County and elsewhere in the state until the Civil War. Camp meetings were held in mid-summer or fall of the year and for many congregations these meetings were annual or semi-annual events. In her diary, which covers a twenty-year period, 1853-1873, Mary Jeffreys Bethell (1821-1875) of Spring Grove Plantation in the northeastern section of the county, provides an interesting view of camp meetings:

Oct. 23 (1855)- I attended a campmeeting at Lowe's near Dr. McCain's, a good many tents and large congregations. I was there Sunday and Monday, I heard the Rev. (Numa) Fletcher Reid preach, he

is one of the best preachers I ever heard, his text on Sunday was from Paul's 1st epistle to Corinthians 23 and 24th verses in the first chapter.... Since I left the camp meeting I heard there was one hundred converts, old Brother Bethell (Rev. Joshua Bethell) seemed to be in the harness... he has been on this circuit two years now, he has been in the ministry about twenty years.

October 16th 1856- The 4th Sunday in Sept. I went to the campmeeting at Lowe's..., there were a good many tents, only four preachers, bro. (William) Bobbitt, (David) Bruton, (Issac) Avent, and (M.C.?) Fields, it broke on Thursday about 70 professed religion. I was there on Sat. Sund. and Monday, heard some good sermons... On Sunday night Willy professed religion. I felt quite happy next day, the thought of God's converting one of my children made me feel so thankful. When I am at campmeeting and hear good preaching, sweet singing and fervent prayers it seems like the gate of heaven to our souls.

August 25, 1860- We moved home yesterday from the campmeeting at Carmel. The Lord revived his work powerfully, 23 souls we trust converted... We had a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, a time long to be remembered, some of the brightest conversions I ever saw, glory and honor to his name. I was happy all the time, God blessed me abundantly. It seemed like a heaven on earth. Brother Bruton (the circuit pastor) labored faithfully and the Lord blessed him and made his soul happy, he is a good preacher and a devoted christian.... Brother Fletcher Reid, Bro. Hendren, Bro. Wilson, Bro. (Clarendon) Pepper, preached for us during the meeting, they preached most excellent sermons. 33

Apparently the camp meetings in Rockingham County ceased with the Civil War and were not revived by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South following the war. Replacing the camp meetings in importance were the circuit quarterly conferences held at different churches on a rotating basis. At times protracted meetings, or revivals, were held in

conjunction with the quarterly conferences. While the Methodist Protestant Church resumed camp meeting activity locally after the Civil War, that concept within the Methodist Episcopal Church was all but a closed chapter in its lengthy history. Moreover, camp meetings after the war were more structured and patterned events - a far cry from the spontaneous gatherings of the antebellum years.

Thus, the camp meeting era in Rockingham County, which lasted from approximately 1800 until the beginning of the Civil War, was vital to the development of Methodism in the area. By this medium Methodism was introduced to new and unexplored areas in the county, such as the communities of Wentworth, Leaksville and Madison and the western and extreme northeastern sections of rural Rockingham County. Also, the camp meetings brought the church to the county's only three settlements and this was where local Methodism made its debut as a fledgling urban denomination. In addition the movement added strength to existing rural churches, such as Lowe's and Mount Carmel, where the camp meeting concept excelled. In essence, the camp meeting era provided Methodism in Rockingham County with the needed stimulus to carry the church over and beyond the dark days of civil war and unrest that loomed just over the horizon.

Antebellum Leaders in Local Methodism

Families are the other major variables besides church formation and revivalism in Rockingham County. In studying

local Methodist Church history, the historian often notes the existence of families who are leaders in the denomination for generations. Rockingham County is indeed no exception to the pattern. The county's most prominent Methodist family consisted of members of the Reid and related families. James Reid (1795-1872) was a native of Caswell County, the son of pioneer Methodists in that area. He entered the Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1815 and joined the itinerant ranks. In 1821 Reid was appointed to serve the Guilford Circuit (which embraced both Guilford and Rockingham counties) and while on the circuit he met and married Martha Edwards, daughter of the Rev. George Rhona Edwards (1769-1829) and his wife Catherine Simmons (1777-1859). Rev. Edwards came to Rockingham County from Mecklenburg County, Virginia about 1816 and settled in the Carmel Woods area of Rockingham County and was instrumental in building up the strength and numbers at the Mount Carmel Church. He was not in the itinerant ministry by this time. 34

Rev. James Reid traveled extensively within the Virginia and then North Carolina Conferences. Reid was one of the first Methodist ministers who remained in the itinerants' ranks after marriage and, therefore, declined "location" status. He remained in the itinerancy for fifty-eight years serving as circuit pastor, presiding elder, Sunday School agent and missionary to black Methodists. In 1872 Reid won

election as the Republican candidate for North Carolina Superintendent of Public Instruction, but died before he could assume the office. 35

James Reid, for many years in his active ministry, maintained the Thompsonville community east of Reidsville as his chief residence and it was there, it is believed, that his second son, Numa Fletcher Reid, was born in July 1825. Young Reid excelled in studies to the extent that he entered Emory and Henry College in 1838 at the age of thirteen. By age seventeen he was teaching school at Thompsonville, the village near Lowe's Church (known today as Williamsburg). In 1843 he was converted at a camp meeting at Mount Carmel and thereafter was zealous in church work. He also taught schools at Salem Church near Reidsville and also at the Wentworth Church, both churches were next door to academies or school buildings. Numa Reid married Ann Wright of Wentworth, the daughter of a tavernkeeper and Methodist, and while living in the county seat resolved to enter the Methodist ministry in 1847. Thus, began the career of Rockingham County's greatest contribution to the Methodist cause. 36

Numa F. Reid, following two years service as a local pastor of the church, was assigned to pastor the Methodist churches in Rockingham County at the 1849 session of the North Carolina Conference. He served the area for two years as recalled by his uncle, the Rev. John W. Lewis (1808-1885):

He (Reid) entered at once upon his work in this new relation as pastor, which was destined... to be a glorious success.... He was well received on every part of the circuit...but he was (also) much beloved by the members of other denominations. (In 1851) he held an interesting camp meeting ... near the town of Madison, which resulted in the conversion of a number of souls, and quite a number of accessions to the Church. He held protracted meetings at nearly all of his appointments ... many souls were converted and added to the Lord. ³⁷

At the 1851 session of the North Carolina Annual Conference, Numa F. Reid was admitted to the travelling connection of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. By 1860 Reid had served as pastor for Front Street Church in Wilmington, Edenton Street Church in Raleigh and West Market Street Church in Greensboro - all leading congregations in the state. From 1860 until his death in 1873, at the age of 47, he served as presiding elder in the Raleigh and Greensboro districts in the North Carolina Conference. At the time of his death he was the state's leading Methodist minister of his generation. Numa F. Reid's home base during most of his ministry was at Wentworth, where his family would be leaders in local Methodism for the next seventy-five years. ³⁸

The equivalent of the Reid family's proliferation on the local level of the Methodist Church was the Field family of Leaksville. Rev. Benton Field (1797-1871) was a native of Randolph County, North Carolina and a member of the Virginia Annual Conference. Citing ill health, Field

resigned from the itinerant ministry and located. In so doing he became a local pastor, a position that allowed him to perform some of the sacraments and other duties similar to itinerant ministers. The local pastor was accountable to the circuit quarterly conference, but was viewed as a member of the laity by the Annual Conference. This allowed the local pastor, such as Field, to pursue a means of secular employment. Following his retirement from the Virginia Conference, Field settled in Rockingham County with his wife Martha Guerrant (1803-1856), the daughter of Thomas Porter and Elizabeth Ellington Guerrant of the Mount Carmel Church. Benton Field was admitted as a local pastor in the Guilford Circuit in 1834 and served in that capacity for a number of years as did his two brothers-in-law, Peter Dutois Guerrant (1806-1869) and Daniel Ellington Guerrant (1804-1895). The Guerrant brothers were grandsons of Daniel Ellington, Sr., whose move to Rockingham County from Prince Edward County, Virginia about 1801 signalled the beginning of Methodism in the Town Creek area. Together the Field and Guerrant families would provide an additional means of support to overtaxed Methodist ministers in Rockingham County. 39

As an official of the Guilford Circuit Quarterly Conference, Benton Field was instrumental in establishing the Methodist churches at Bethlehem (1835) and Wentworth (1836), serving on the first building committee at each church before moving to Leaksville in 1840. 40 At Leaksville, Field

reorganized the small Methodist society meeting in the local academy there and transformed the group into an active congregation. Benton Field was active in all phases of Rockingham County Methodism until his death in 1871. It would be his son, Daniel Early Field (1831-1916), who would continue the family's tradition of service to the church into the twentieth century.

The role played by these families in the development of Rockingham County Methodism is interesting, in that these families had roots in Virginia - primarily the south central portion of the state. The Reids and Fields dominated the church in Rockingham County, unlike any other families for well over fifty years. Very seldom was a new church organized, one constructed or one revived in the area without the ever-present hand and aid of either one or both families. They provided the ecclesiastical and lay leadership for Methodism in Rockingham County and the success of the church during the nineteenth century was due largely to their labors.

CHAPTER IV
REALIGNMENTS, SCHISMS AND DECLINE WITHIN THE
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Within a forty-year period from the late 1820s to the late 1860s the Methodist Episcopal Church experienced significant structural, administrative and spiritual changes on the national and local level. Within this time frame the Methodist Episcopal Church experienced two national divisions, the creation of smaller districts and circuits, and a general decline in strength with the close of the Civil War. Rockingham County would experience all three conditions with varying degrees of severity along with the majority of the piedmont counties in the state. By the end of the war and initial Reconstruction the Methodist Episcopal Church in the county was but a weakened frame of its former self, desperately in need of a great revival.

Circuit and District Realignment

Though the Methodist Episcopal Church had been active in Rockingham County since the 1780s, it was nearly fifty years before the county was accorded a position all to itself within the church. Rockingham County was originally a part of the Guilford Circuit which had been created in 1783 from the New Hope and Yadkin circuits. In 1801, when the district concept of church government was formally

adopted, the Guilford Circuit was placed in the Salisbury District. The following year saw the formal establishment of the Virginia Annual Conference which covered most of Virginia and North Carolina. In 1808 the Virginia Conference placed the Guilford Circuit in the Yadkin District where it remained until 1834 when it was returned to the Salisbury District. By 1837 Methodists in both Virginia and North Carolina believed that the Virginia Conference had become too unwieldy to exist in two states. In anticipation of the inevitable division of the Virginia Conference, the Rockingham County churches in the Guilford Circuit were placed into a circuit of its own known as "Rockingham." The Rockingham Circuit was placed in the Danville District - a district that extended over into some of the border counties of Virginia for some years to come. ¹

A new age in North Carolina Methodism dawned on January 31, 1838 with the formation of the North Carolina Conference, which included most of the eastern and piedmont regions of the state. The Danville District was absorbed into the new annual conference. No other realignments were made regarding circuits and districts in Rockingham County until the 1850 session of the North Carolina Conference. At this time, the name of the Rockingham Circuit was changed to Wentworth Circuit and the Greensboro District altered its boundaries to include all of Rockingham County. Essentially, all of Rockingham County churches of the Methodist Episcopal Church,

South were on a single circuit until 1861 when the annual conference ordered the Wentworth Circuit divided. The reasons behind the division were related to the numerous preaching points now served by a single pastor being far too many for any one man. The circuit division was made along the Dan River; those churches west of the river were placed in the new Madison Circuit while those east of the river remained in the Wentworth Circuit. Thus, from 1861 until 1879 all of the M.E. Church, South congregations in Rockingham County were included in either the Wentworth or Madison circuit. ²

While all these structural changes were occurring within the Methodist Episcopal Church on the state and local level, the church was beset by two national divisions.

The Rise of the Methodist Protestant Church

The discontent that led to the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church in 1830 developed early in the Methodist Episcopal Church. The 1830 schism was not the first within the church. At the 1792 General Conference Rev. James O'Kelly, an early favorite of Asbury's, asserted that ministers should be given the right to appeal their pastoral appointments if they felt that such appointments were detrimental to their careers or personal lives. When O'Kelly's proposal was defeated he withdrew from the conference and formed the Republican Methodist Church which became the Christian Church in 1801. There were also such disputes as

the appointment by bishops of presiding elders, the absence of lay representation in both the annual and General conferences, and the reference to local pastors as merely members of the laity. Clearly, the Methodist Episcopal Church was a denomination in which the laity had little, if any, voice beyond the quarterly conference.³ In other words, the Methodist Church "faced the curious paradox of gaining phenomenal influence among lay persons with whom it would not share ecclesiastical authority."⁴ As the denomination had been organized as a "people's church" it had quickly become a bastion of national hypocrisy at its vilest.

At the 1824 General Conference a petition was submitted for the incorporation of democratic principles into the church government. When the petition was rejected seventeen members of the clergy and three lay persons met in Maryland to organize the Union Society, the purpose of which was to advocate democratic reform within the Methodist Episcopal Church. Union societies were organized all over the eastern half of the country, including North Carolina. By late 1828 enough congregations in North Carolina were weary of attempts at reform to the extent that a meeting was called at Whitaker's Chapel in Halifax County in December. On December 19, 1828 this meeting established the North Carolina Conference of the Associated Methodist Church - an entity wholly separate from the Methodist Episcopal Church. With a few exceptions, in

which entire congregations withdrew from the Methodist Episcopal Church, local congregations were organized by ministers of the Associated Methodist and later the Methodist Protestant churches. ⁵

Once the General Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church was organized in 1830 the North Carolina Conference of the Associated Methodist Church became allied with the national body. Technically, the North Carolina Conference predated the General Conference and was older than any other annual conference within the new denomination. During the time between the formation of the North Carolina Conference of the Associated Methodist Church in 1828 and its assimilation into the Methodist Protestant Church in 1830, six preaching circuits were created within the state. More and more people were being reached by the missionaries of this new branch of Methodism. One of these six circuits was the Guilford which was created in 1829 and the westernmost circuit in the state at the time. Included in the Guilford Circuit were Guilford, Rockingham and probably parts of adjoining counties to the south and west. ⁶

The basic democratic principles of the Methodist Protestant Church arose from the Jeffersonian Democracy sentiment that existed in abundance in rural America. The central portion of North Carolina possessed deep ties with "Jeffersonianism" and it was in that portion of the state that the Methodist Protestant Church was the strongest. First, the

Methodist Protestant Church allowed for the admission of members of the laity into the annual and General conferences. This in itself was a major departure from the dictates of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Second, the M.P. Church refused to have bishops, opting instead for presidents elected from the conference bodies themselves. Thus, the whole concept of the episcopacy was rejected in the new church. Third, the presiding elders in the M.P. Church were also elected by the annual conferences instead of being appointed by the bishops.⁷ Moreover, the position of presiding elder was modified as expressed by Dr. J. Elwood Carroll in his history of the North Carolina M. P.

Conference:

The Presiding Elder (in the M.E. Church) had the power to change, receive, or suspend preachers during the intervals between annual conference sessions; to call together the preachers at each quarterly meeting; to see that the Discipline was enforced; and to attend the bishop when present in the elder's district, and give him a written account of affairs when absent. In this way no preacher of any grade or station was ever left a day without a superior...

The Methodist Protestant Church solved the problem in the early years by having the stationing committee (elected by the annual conference) designate the "presiding elders," who supervised the several preachers on a circuit. The appointment was for one year only, but the presiding elder could succeed himself. Gradually, circuits were divided into smaller fields of labor until each appointment became the individual responsibility of a minister, hence the need for a presiding elder to superintend the preachers no longer existed.⁸

The position of circuit presiding elder or superintendent was apparently dropped by the North Carolina Conference of the M.P. Church during the early 1870s.

Nor was this limit to the democratic reforms expoused by the Methodist Protestant Church. Local pastors, who were not officially recognized in the M.E. Church beyond the circuit level, were made official delegate members of the quarterly, annual and General conferences in the M.P. Church. Also the M.P. Church advocated fair trials and rights of appeal for both accused ministers and lay persons as well as a reasonable time allowed for accused persons to prepare their defense.⁹ Consequently, the Methodist Protestant Church was perhaps American Methodism's most direct attempt in establishing a democratic form of church government ever.

Methodist Protestants in Rockingham County

The Guilford Methodist Protestant Circuit did include Rockingham County from the time of its inception in 1829. Of the ten pastors assigned to the Guilford Circuit that year, the most noted was the Rev. Alson Gray (d. 1880) who would serve as President of the North Carolina Conference from 1836-1838, 1843-1845, 1846-1848, and 1854-1855. One of the pioneers within the fledgling denomination, Gray would become very familiar with southern Rockingham County during his fruitful career. Among those churches in Guilford County that were on the Guilford Circuit were Moriah, south

of Greensboro; Bethel, south of Stokesdale and Flat Rock, east of Stokesdale near the Guilford-Rockingham county line. These three congregations were former Methodist Episcopal congregations that went over to the Methodist Protestant Church. Flat Rock, which according to tradition dates as early as 1804-1805, was greatly revived by the itinerancy of Rev. Gray and a Methodist Protestant congregation was organized there supposedly in 1831. Flat Rock was attended by many Methodists just over the border in Rockingham County and the famous camp meetings held at Flat Rock were widely attended throughout the 1800s. ¹⁰

Rockingham County's first successful Methodist Protestant Church was Fair Grove, organized shortly after 1830 by the Rev. Gray. The actual date of founding for Fair Grove is, like most early Methodist churches, unclear. The first indication of the congregation appears in the Rockingham County deeds. On November 19, 1832 James Donnell of Guilford County sold to Robert C. Rankin, Elijah Chilcutt, Nathaniel Simpson and William Schoolfield of Guilford and James and Thomas Hopkins of Rockingham County, the trustees for Fair Grove, a five-acre lot on the Patrick (later Cunningham) Mill Road just north of the Guilford County line. ¹¹ Tradition holds that a log meetinghouse was erected on this site and was used for the next quarter century. Regular preaching was first held at Fair Grove in May 1833 and the first camp meeting there was held in September 1833 with twenty-nine

converts. ¹² Camp meetings were held at Fair Grove even into the twentieth century in a nearby brush arbor, beginning usually the second Sunday in August. The earliest membership roll for Fair Grove is dated 1848 and contains among the sixty-six members those of the Chilcutt, Rankin, Bevill, Hopkins, Simpson and Dilworth families. In 1856 the congregation constructed a frame meetinghouse which was used until the 1960s. The North Carolina Annual Conference met at Fair Grove in 1840, 1848, 1863 and 1883. ¹³

An early leader in the Fair Grove Church was Elijah Chilcutt (1795-1874) who owned several tracts of land in Guilford County near the Rockingham County line. Chilcutt was a most pious man who read through the Bible 122 times during his lifetime. Tradition in the community holds that during a dry season once a forest fire broke out which endangered the Fair Grove Church and surrounding area. Chilcutt was said to have "left (his) work and started to the church. About half way, he stopped and prayed for rain. Within 15 minutes the rain drowned the fire and Fair Grove church... was saved." ¹⁴

A division within one of the Methodist Episcopal churches in Rockingham County apparently led to the creation of Mizpah Church, some five miles south of Reidsville, about 1850. According to tradition, several men withdrew their memberships from the Lowe's Church "sometime prior to 1850," the exact nature of the division is not now known. These men

and others secured a lot on Troublesome Creek at the intersection of the Danville and Wentworth roads and on which was constructed a frame sanctuary. This sanctuary was said to have been dedicated by Rev. John Hinshaw of the Guilford M.P. Circuit on March 30, 1850. ¹⁵ In 1854 the church trustees of Mizpah formally purchased the property on which the church was constructed from Mr. and Mrs. John V. Jones. The trustees were: Ezekiel Wheeler, a former member of Lowe's; Samuel S.B. Smith, a county constable; Joseph P. Coe and Tilman Chance. The 1850 sanctuary was used until 1925 when the present sanctuary was built next door. ¹⁶

By 1856 a small society of Methodist Protestants had organized between Madison and present-day Stokesdale. This congregation was named Palestine and was possibly an outgrowth of the Flat Rock Church some miles to the south. Tradition holds that the first church was of log construction with benches made of planks laid across wooden blocks. Palestine became a popular camp meeting site during the mid and late 1800s and it was these "big meetings" there that permitted such growth that discouraged the organization of another permanent Methodist Protestant congregation in the area for the next forty years. ¹⁷

Another, yet relatively unknown, Methodist Protestant congregation in the southwestern section of the county was Oak Grove - another popular campground. Oak Grove was organized in 1854 probably in the present-day Ellisboro

community. The congregation appears to have disbanded or otherwise become inactive within a few years. The strength of Primitive Baptists in the area and the close proximity to the Methodist Protestant Church at Palestine were, no doubt, determining factors in the failure to revive the congregation at Oak Grove in the 1870s. 18

During the 1850s the fruitful activities of the congregations of the Guilford M.P. Circuit convinced the North Carolina Annual Conference to divide that circuit. At the 1856 session of the Annual Conference the Guilford Circuit was divided along Reedy Fork Creek in northern Guilford County. Those churches north of Reedy Fork, with one exception, would be placed into a new circuit to be named "Haw River." These churches included Fair Grove, Mizpah, Palestine and Oak Grove in Rockingham County, and Friendship, Bethel, and Flat Rock churches in Guilford County. The Haw River Circuit would thus remain virtually intact until 1882. 19

While the Methodist Protestants were busy organizing churches in Rockingham County, their Methodist Episcopal brethren were faced with a national division within their ranks.

The "Great Separation" of 1844

While the division of the Methodist Episcopal Church erupted in 1844 the roots of disunion could be traced back

to the origins of the denomination. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, sessions of the General Conference had been disrupted by arguments concerning slave-holding members of the laity and clergy. While Asbury, Wesley and other Methodist leaders were opponents of the "dreadful institution" others in the church, especially those in the South, were far more tolerant of slavery. Thus, the issue of slavery simmered within the church until the 1844 General Conference when it became a most explosive issue.

The occasion of the heated argument at the 1844 session of the General Conference was the request of the Northern delegates that Bishop James Andrew of Georgia resign his episcopal position as he had taken a slaveholder as his second wife. Methodist discipline forbade the owning of slaves except in the states where manumission was illegal. Georgia was such a state, leading Bishop Andrew to vest his share of slaves in his wife. Technically, in the eyes of the law Bishop Andrew was no longer a slaveholder. This, however, did not satisfy the Northern members of the General Conference who still demanded the bishop's dismissal and were able to secure a resolution to that end. Both Northern and Southern delegates were ruled by passions and tempers at the session and thus attempts to settling the issue peacefully came to naught. Northerners wished to make an example of Bishop Andrew for other church leaders; Southerners believed that Andrew was made a scapegoat on behalf of the Southern

congregations. The Southern delegates believed that only a division of the church could remedy the situation for both factions concerned. Thus, the General Conference of 1844 adopted a "Plan of Separation" whereby those churches in the South would be placed in a separate branch of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Those churches in the North would remain as ante-separation. The Southern church would be totally independent of the Northern Methodist Episcopal Church, with both parties agreeing not to seize churches that adhered to one or the other branches of Episcopal Methodism. Thus, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was formally organized at Louisville, Kentucky in 1845 with the first session of its General Conference convening in Petersburg, Virginia the following year. 20

While the Southern Methodists believed that the separation had been accomplished amicably initially, such would not prove to be the case. The General Conference of the (Northern) Methodist Episcopal Church of 1848 rejected the Plan of Separation to which they had agreed to just four years previous on the pretext that the annual conferences had not been given the opportunity to debate and vote on the issue. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South instituted legal proceedings which carried all the way to the United States Supreme Court. The court ruled

in favor of the Southern church and the "Plan of Separation" was upheld. ²¹ Meanwhile, many churches in the south, fearing possible takeovers by the Northern church, deeded over their local church properties to newly elected trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Lowe's, Mt. Carmel, and Salem churches in Rockingham County were among those who took such action. The Methodist Episcopal Church would thus remain divided nationally until 1939. ²² The Methodist Protestant Church would also divide along sectional lines in 1858, but reunite in 1877. ²³

Some historians have made the assumption that the rural yeoman-dominated Southern Methodists were not overly concerned with the slavery issue. That is simply not the case. In fact, as early as October 1835 the Guilford Methodist Episcopal Circuit of the Virginia Conference meeting in Wentworth adopted a resolution condemning the circulation of "incendiary" publications produced by Northern abolitionists. The circuit quarterly conference also went on record as opposing and condemning the views of all Northern abolitionists as being injurious to the South. The resolution was unanimously adopted. ²⁴

A common misconception of church historians concerns the role of blacks in the antebellum congregation. The misconception was that blacks were not recognized by the church. Blacks, be they slaves or free men, were granted memberships within all three branches of Methodism, though

as a general rule they were not allowed to organize their own congregations. They were not allowed to hold offices in the church; however, they were administered the sacraments of the church. Religious historians, such as Donald G. Mathews, contend that as "Methodists could not leave Negroes helpless in their plight any more than whites, the bishops proposed expanding the missions to the slaves." ²⁵ Usually, the blacks were relegated to either the balcony in the church or to another segregated section of the sanctuary. Moreover, there existed a form of evangelical pro-slavery that regarded the institution as both a Christian duty and privilege to maintain. In her diary of plantation life in antebellum Rockingham County, Mary J. Bethell provides a glimpse of the complexity of this evangelical pro-slavery ethic that is now a concern of modern historians:

Nov. 3, 1856- ...As we were coming home from the campmeeting at Prospect (Church, near Yanceyville in Caswell County), Mr. Bethell and myself, were in the carriage, with the babe and his nurse Betty. I was singing and talking about the good sermons I heard, and how happy I had been. All at once Betty, the nurse (13 years old) broke out to saying "Oh! Miss Mary, I believe God will have mercy on me." I was astonished: I told her that God would bless her if she would believe. After she got home she professed religion. I felt very thankful, I hope God will convert all my negroes. I am praying for it. I read the Bible to them Sunday nights and instruct them, and sing and pray with them. Some of them listen attentively but all my labour will be in vain without the help of God. ²⁶

Historian Donald Mathews complements Mrs. Bethell's remarks with his observation that:

Slavery would be stable... only when it was seen as a moral relationship in which whites demonstrated a real concern for blacks' well-being, established common ground between the master and slave, and appealed to the latter's best instincts instead of making him "stand in fear." 27

Wartime Decline of the Church

Throughout the 1850s the churches of the Methodist faith in Rockingham County were prospering, but the Civil War would nearly sound the death knell for all denominations in the South. Fragmentary records available provide a shadowy view of the decline of at least the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in the area. In 1861 there were 678 Southern Methodist communicants in Rockingham County among the white and black population and scattered among a dozen or so churches and preaching points. Beginning in 1862 the county had two M.E. South circuits, each served by one minister. This division within the county lightened the load of a single circuit-riding minister. For example, the Wentworth Circuit, which covered the eastern half of the county, contained 371 members in 1862 following the division. The black membership, which numbered an all-time high of 109 in 1859, was already on the wane before the war even started. By 1860 the black membership totalled only 32 county-wide. Evidently, a revival was needed throughout the county as the war began. 28

The minister assigned to the Wentworth Circuit for 1862 and 1863 was the Rev. Clarendon Martin Pepper (1830-1895),

one of the great revivalists in North Carolina Methodism. Mary Bethell's diary provides some details regarding the intensive labors of the Rev. Pepper:

March 3, 1862- I went to Union (Church) yesterday to hear Brother Pepper preach, 'twas an excellent sermon, had a good congregation. After sermon he held class meeting, 'twas a good meeting, I enjoyed it, my soul was happy... Brother Pepper is doing his duty, he is a devoted child of God. I feel like there will be a revival on his circuit, the Lord will bless his labors.

October 12, 1862- I have just returned home from Wentworth, I attended Brother Pepper's meeting. I was there six days, and saw one of the greatest revivals I have seen in two years, it was a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. There were about 40 converts, 23 joined the church. 29

In a letter to his father from Wentworth in November 1863 Rev. Pepper wrote: "...on this circuit I have been having some extensive revivals of religion. I have received into the church nearly a hundred members this summer and fall." The Wentworth Circuit membership increased from 371 in 1862 to 523 in 1863, due in large part to Rev. Pepper's untiring efforts. Unfortunately, such success was fleeting. 30

Few times in the life of the South were as trying for the rural churches and communities as was during the Civil War. The draft certainly had an effect upon church attendance. With decreased attendance on Sundays morale became quite low within the congregations, especially as the fortunes of the Confederacy waned from one of great anticipation to the

bitter taste of reality. Dr. Numa F. Reid, noted minister in the state who made Wentworth his home base during the war years, recorded the high and, then, the crushed hopes of local Methodists and other citizens:

May 20, 1861- Today the State Convention met and passed the ordinance of secession from the Federal Government... The die is cast. The Rubicon is crossed.

June 25, 1861- John Boyd's fine company left Wentworth today. This is the fifth company old Rockingham is giving the Confederacy... What a handsome sight to see the "boys" march proudly away, but oh, what sadness fills the heart when we think the ranks will be thinned by shot and shell before they come back to us.

August 30, 1861- Rode down to Mr. George D. Boyd's this evening. Capt. John H. Boyd died in Richmond Hospital. Typhoid fever. He was brought home today.

August 31, 1861- Today at 2 p.m., in honor and tears we deposited the remains of Captain Boyd in the graveyard in rear of the Wentworth Methodist Church... What a day of sadness for all in Wentworth! ³¹

George D. Boyd, a member of the Wentworth Church would lose two additional sons before the war's end.

As the war progressed and the fortunes of the Confederacy faded like last night's dream, the churches in the South were involved in a life and death struggle. Attendance at all church activities decreased as a spiritual indifference pervaded the region. The class meeting, once a touchstone in Methodism, was quickly becoming an anachronism that would die out completely by the end of the century.

The financial base of the churches was totally ruined and many congregations simply passed out of existence. The cessation of hostilities between the United States and the now-deposed Confederate Government did not remedy the situation as evidenced by the following passages in Mary Bethell's diary:

August 7, 1865- I feel sad when I look at the church, almost desolate, some of the members have died, and some backslidden, nearly all of the rest worldly minded, prayer meetings, class meetings, Sunday School, all are broken up because iniquity abounds. The love of many has waxed cold, all are selfish and seeking their own... The war is over, but still there is much trouble and a great deal of wickedness, if the people don't repent I expect they will have some judgements sent upon them, I look for it. Some of our prominent members of the church to all appearances look cold, lifeless, and backslidden. I sigh and grieve on account of it.

October 10, 1866- Oh, our church is almost desolate, Zion languishes, such coldness and worldly mindness in the church, I feel so sad, what can I do but look to God and pray to Him to ... revive his work and stir us up to a lively faith. 32

Mrs. Bethell had good reasons for alarm. The white membership on the Wentworth Circuit decreased by nearly ten percent during 1865-1866, while the black membership plummeted by fifty percent during the same period. Zion was indeed languishing. The close of the Civil War found all Methodist churches struggling for bare existence. It was a definite low water mark in their history, but with the 1870s the showers of blessings would once again descend upon the churches in Rockingham County and the South in general.

CHAPTER V

ROCKINGHAM COUNTY METHODIST CHURCH ARCHITECTURE

1780s - 1860s

Methodist church architecture and design tell a graphic story of religious struggle and achievement. Much like their industrious Moravian brethren, the Methodists employed a basic design of their earlier sanctuaries that was distinctively Methodist. For nearly the first century of the existence of Methodism in America certain guidelines and traditions were followed in the planning and construction of meetinghouses, known in later years as sanctuaries. In essence, Methodist edifices were to be physical extensions of the denomination's beliefs and practices. Only recently have social historians begun to acknowledge the importance of church architecture in the rural antebellum South as a means of further understanding regional church history. Rockingham County is an excellent study for those interested in this aspect and making helpful interpretations from such study.

The basic premises of Methodism governed the design of church buildings. As American Methodism jettisoned much of the pomp and ceremony of the Church of England, so did it drop any desire of architectural elegance for which the Anglicans were famed. No one in the United States was more adamant in advocating simplicity in church design than Bishop Asbury. ¹

The Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South maintained Asbury's premise on church construction even years after his death:

Let all our churches be built plain and decent, and with free seats; but not more expensive than is absolutely unavoidable; otherwise the necessity of raising money will make rich men necessary to us. But if so, we must be dependent on them, yea, and governed by them. And then farewell to Methodist discipline, if not doctrine too... (The) quarterly conference shall appoint a judicious committee of at least three members of our Church, who shall form an estimate of the amount necessary to build; and three-fourths of the money, according to such estimate, shall be secured or subscribed before any such building shall be commenced... As it is contrary to our economy to build houses with pews to sell or rent, it shall be the duty of the several annual conferences to use their influence to prevent houses from being so built in future; and as far as possible to make those houses free which have already been built with pews. ²

Asbury furthermore opposed any signs of "Roman Catholicism or Anglicanism" in Methodist church design. He spoke out against the use of bells and steeples, as both were considered by him to be symbols of the rich and influential. Such embellishments were alien to the religion of the "poor people" to whom Asbury ministered. Not until the years following the Civil War would Methodist churches begin to stray away from Asbury's policies. ³

What, then, was the typical design of the average Methodist church prior to the Civil War? Obviously, the first meetinghouses were largely of log construction - especially in the rural areas. A plank floor and benches

were likely even in the pioneer days. With the advent of the Age of Jackson rural church design was undergoing a significant change. In the South it was common for congregations to erect frame sanctuaries now. These buildings ranged in sizes but seldom varied in function or design. A typical meetinghouse possessed two front doors, the men and women entering separately. John Wesley, possibly due to the Moravian influence, dictated that men and women were to be segregated in all Methodist congregations.⁴ This seating arrangement remained in force until the late nineteenth century. As the average meetinghouse had two front doors, it would also have two distinct aisles within the ranks of pews inside. The pew arrangement consisted of one center rank of long pews flanked on either side by a narrower rank of pews. Through the long center rank of pews usually ran a partition or rail in the middle that served as the "dividing line" between the men and women. Inside and over the front doors was oftentimes a gallery for the exclusive use of the black members. If the added expense of a gallery was prohibitive and the number of black members relatively small, then the rear pews in the sanctuary or some similar designated area would suffice. These practices were common in both the Methodist Episcopal and the Methodist Protestant churches.⁵

Simplicity ruled the day in Methodism. The pulpit usually consisted of a plain raised platform, the only adornments to which being a lectern of some kind and a

modest chancel rail. As Methodists received the Eucharist in kneeling position, a chancel or communion rail was an essential, rarely spared, in most early "preaching houses." Matching the pulpit in simplicity were the pews often consisting of wide pine boards. Unlike the pews in churches of other denominations, Methodist pews were noted for the absence of boards across their fronts under the seat. This absence allowed members to kneel on their knees within their pews. Candles provided the only means of lighting during those early years. Except in the cities, there were no organs in the churches until the late 1800s. While steeples were not in keeping with Methodist church design, a small and low belfry atop the sanctuary was often used. Plank floors, ceilings, and walls (unless plaster was used) contributed to the unassuming appearance of most Methodist buildings. The late Victorian Era would change such examples of ruralistic austerity from even the most isolated congregations. ⁶

Likely the finest Methodist Church buildings of the day in the county were those at Madison and at Wentworth. The Madison Church was constructed in 1844 much on the order mentioned above. The Madison sanctuary was used by the congregation until 1909 when it was replaced by a modern brick edifice. The former sanctuary was moved across Academy Street and experienced various uses until its demolition in 1977. ⁷ The Wentworth Church, constructed and dedicated in 1859, was built on lines similar to the Madison Church. Recently

restored, the Wentworth Church is the county's oldest Methodist edifice, and the county's first church listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Both the Madison and Wentworth churches were built in accordance with the Methodist discipline. ⁸

In summation, the architecture of the rural Methodist Church exuded the precepts and traditions of American Methodism. Simplicity and segregation were the order of the day. In spite of this self-imposed architectural piety, Methodists would indeed succumb to the worldly embellishments that Asbury so very much loathed. The Civil War proved to be a watershed in Methodist church design. Steeples, organs, bells, and stained glass windows would become an integral part of the entire worship experience. The very church that Asbury nurtured would become "dependent and governed by rich men." As the latter half of the nineteenth century loomed ahead, a new and less strict form of Methodism was preparing to immerse itself into the mainstream of American Protestantism.

CHAPTER VI

THE REVIVAL, REBIRTH AND URBANIZATION OF LOCAL METHODISM

1870 - 1920

The aftermath of the Civil War left churches throughout the South spiritually and financially wrecked. As the largest group within American Protestantism at the time, the Methodists felt the effects of the war most keenly indeed. Memberships and attendance were both in decline, the churches were largely in disrepair and neglect, and a spiritual indifference pervaded the region. With the threat of the Methodist Episcopal Church of the North poised to infiltrate the former Confederacy, Southern Methodists quickly assessed the situation and took measures to halt the continuing decline in strength and vigor. The subsequent revival, which was predominant within the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was successful for several reasons: the age of the "protracted meeting" as a latter day successor to the camp meetings, the maturation of auxiliary ministries within the local church, the urbanization of the local church, and Methodism's involvement in social issues as well as its indifference to theological disputes. As Methodism made its post-war recovery, a special pattern was detectable. While the rise of Methodism in Rockingham County during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was largely a rural-dominated movement the next wave of revival,

which lasted from 1870 until the First World War, was mostly urban in nature. Thus, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South became a bastion of the upper class in Rockingham County - largely through the church's advances in more populated areas.

The need for a revival within the Southern Methodist Church was apparent to those in Rockingham County even before the conclusion of hostilities between the Union and the Confederacy. In December 1862 the Rev. Numa F. Reid, of Wentworth, delivered a speech to the session of the North Carolina Annual Conference that expressed the concerns and needs of Methodists throughout the South:

(We) need a race of moral heroes, a whole race of men of faith and ready for sacrifice, to throw themselves upon the bosom of heathendom with flaming hearts and burning zeal. Ah! one is ready to say, how can they be sustained? - we have not the means, no banking house upon which they can draw... We must cut loose our moorings and try the great deep... We must have a revolution and now is the time... The darkness of the hour is that which preceeds the coming down (which) is the twilight of a glorious era shortly to be ushered in!

These words of the Rev. Dr. Reid were clear prophecy. Indeed, the war was the darkness before the "twilight of a glorious era" in the history of Methodism. This era would begin with the revival of the church during Reconstruction and culminate with the unification of the three major branches of American Methodism in 1939.

The Protracted Meeting Era

One of the means of revival for the Methodist congregations in Rockingham County was a latter-day adaptation of the famed camp meetings of the early nineteenth century - the protracted meeting. In fact, the protracted meeting concept had arrived in Rockingham County during the war years as the camp meeting era quickly waned. The war had eliminated camp meetings for the most part and in cases where the practice was revived after the war a noticeable change was detectable as expressed by the Rev. R. R. Michaux, a Methodist Protestant minister who served charges in Guilford and Rockingham counties after the war:

The camp meeting has been a great institution in N. Carolina, being held mostly by Methodists, but of late years these meetings, in most localities, have ceased to be held, and the old encampments are going to decay. Perhaps it is well, for the camp meeting of the present day is not what it used to be. It seems now to be appreciated by many as a resort for social enjoyment, in common with other pleasure resorts, rather than for religious improvement. The great burden on the women at the tent, of preparing the Sunday dinner, and the free entertainment of so many visitors, and the comparatively small spiritual benefits resulting, being considered, it is judged best to dispense with the camp, and hold protracted day services only. 2

The "protracted" meeting, named so because they were drawn out or protracted over a period of days or weeks, became the chief tool for bringing new members into the church. As the camp meeting era was closing, the protracted meeting was quickly becoming a more refined successor to

the former institution. Often, protracted meetings were held in conjunction with circuit quarterly conferences which combined business, worship and fellowship into a single series of services. The protracted meetings were usually annual events held indoors as a general rule. Rev. Dr. J. Elwood Carroll, who was raised in the Salem Methodist Episcopal Church, South near Reidsville and is a respected member of the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, recalled his earliest memories of the "big meetings" held at Salem during the first part of the twentieth century:

We (Salem Church) always had one about the time between laying by the crops and harvesting them. There was always a slight slack time between those two activities. We always had a visiting minister. The series opened on Sunday with preaching in the morning and afternoon with "dinner on the grounds." On some occasions we would continue with two preaching services with "dinner on the grounds" through the remainder of the week but it is believed that the women were not too happy with that much cooking so the schedule shifted to a morning sermon with the minister eating in the homes of the members, then a preaching service at night. I recall how often the minister came to our home for dinner, and how long they could eat and talk. The fried chicken got down pretty close to the necks, back, feet and wings by the time we children had a turn at the second table.

Yes, the revival services always included an "altar call" for repentants and new members. It was at one of these services when I was nine years old, I made by decision to follow Christ and with a large group of about fifteen other young people received baptism and took the vow of church membership there at Salem. ³

Dr. Carroll's reflections are insightful in several respects. His reference to morning and afternoon services and the time of year in which these services were held is important to understanding the rural church character. During the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century the rural congregations were made up of exclusively farm families. The scheduling of services accommodated the lifestyles of local farmers. In essence, farming not only supported families, it also provided the main financial support for the churches. Moreover, the protracted meetings provided a source of community fellowship and interaction that was unobtainable elsewhere in rural areas.

Certainly revivals were much more than mere social gatherings as historian Ted Ownby alludes:

Despite their popularity as social events, the revival meetings had far greater significance as religious institutions. Good times, gossip, and huge meals gave way to more solemn business as the meetings progressed... Three levels of participation - initiation for new Christians, rededication for longtime Christians, and hope for the salvation of the wayward - reveal the meetings as yearly festivals celebrating evangelical beliefs and morality...

Historians have often pictured revival meetings as pleasant social occasions that showed the neighborliness and local character of rural America... However, serious business took place at the meetings, as committed evangelicals, novice evangelicals, and nominal evangelicals all participated in solemn, sometimes painful religious exercises. ⁴

By the early 1900s the concept of the protracted meeting was already on the decline in congregations in Rockingham County as well as in the rest of the South. Evangelism seemed to be on the wane in Southern Methodism and this would seem to be related to the church's advances within the more populated areas. Could it have been that the "refinement" of Methodism allowed no room for "spontaneous evangelism?" Methodists were becoming more concerned by the turn-of-the-century with promoting the auxiliary ministries and waging war against the great moral evil of the day - alcohol. What Methodists failed to realize was that evangelism was the essential key element to success in promoting church growth and moral values. Many within the church sensed that Methodism was turning its back upon the fires of faith that had so "strangely warmed" the hearts of Wesley and others of a bygone era. J. C. Lasley, a member of the Salem Church near Reidsville, summed up the situation in 1932 when he wrote:

If the young people of today should be at church and see some good woman rise up and commence shouting as I saw in my young day, they would call the police... The people of today would not appreciate the preaching of the old time preacher... neither would the old timer appreciate the sermons of the preachers of today. ⁵

Methodism in Rockingham County, as well as in the rest of the South, had indeed undergone a great change physically and psychologically.

What, then, were the results, if any, of the "protracted meeting" era? It must be recalled the miserable state of the church at the close of the war in 1865. Wrecked, if existent, economy; diminishing memberships, spiritual indifference, and a dearth of church-related programs outside of the worship services were all characteristics of the typical Southern congregation. The revival meetings pulled these churches out of the seemingly fathomless abyss of financial and spiritual depravity and restored them to, and in most cases exceeded, their antebellum security and stability. Perhaps, the age of revivalism within local Methodism had run its course and had accomplished its task. (That observation could quite plausibly be made.) Whatever the case, by the advent of the "Roaring Twenties" revivalism was definitely on the wane in the South and Methodism would never successfully regain the lost fires of evangelism that had once saved the church from certain obscurity.

The Rebirth of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Rockingham County

Another major factor in the revival and expansion of local Methodism during the late 1800s was the rise of the Methodist Episcopal Church (more commonly known as "Northern Methodists"). The violent capitulation of the Confederate Government in the spring of 1865 also signalled a change within the Methodist Church in the South. The wartime decline

of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the arrival of the "Northern Methodists" occurred at approximately the same time. The entry of the Northern sect into the conquered and broken South during the waning days of the war was seen by most Southern Methodists as a blatant violation of the spirit, if not the actual doctrine, of the 1844 Plan of Separation. Southerners resented this intrusion by Northern and converted Southern missionaries, but were powerless to prevent their activities. Originally, the Southern Methodists wanted to retain their black memberships and thus maintain the "status quo-antebellum." The blacks, however, would have none of that and their exodus from the galleries of the white churches continued unabated. In the wake of their hasty departure from an established church system the blacks, largely uneducated and practically all subjected to poverty, lacked the human and financial resources necessary to organize effective congregations. Into this bleak picture appeared the Methodist Episcopal Church which had intended to organize both white and black congregations throughout the South and did so in many areas. Unlike some of her sister counties, such as Forsyth, Rockingham County would regard the Methodist Episcopal Church as a single race denomination - one of and exclusively for the black population. ⁶

Whites were alarmed that freed blacks were no longer confined to particular areas in society. Without the "control" of the local leading white Christians it seemed to many that

blacks would fall prey to "indolence and immorality." A recent social historian has stated that "As white churches became exclusively or almost exclusively white, black culture came to seem even more alien than it had in the antebellum years." ⁷ A prime example of this observation in Rockingham County occurred around 1900 when the black Methodists in Leaksville attempted to build a new church in the heart of the white community - a project doused by the local whites. Acts similar to these led to a distancing between white and black congregations that not even the 1939 unification could or would lessen.

The efforts of the Northern missionaries were successful with the establishing of the Virginia and North Carolina Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1867. By 1868 a North Carolina District was created within that conference and a circuit known as "Rockingham" was formed. This is the earliest reference to activity by the Northern Methodists in Rockingham County. With 2,859 members, the North Carolina Conference of the M.E. Church was organized in 1869. Originally, this conference was biracial, but in 1879 the whites pulled out to organize the Southern Central Conference. From that time on the Methodist Episcopal Church in North Carolina was a racially separated denomination. ⁸

In 1869 the North Carolina Conference created the Guilford and Rockingham Circuit, which included those two counties and to which was appointed the Rev. W. B. Richardson.

Richardson had been expelled from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South due to his pro-Union sympathies. He was a proponent for the rights of blacks and after joining the Methodist Episcopal Church was active in establishing black congregations. It is likely that his efforts led to the founding of the first black Methodist churches in the county. Rockingham County was now accorded an official position within the bounds of the Methodist Episcopal Church. ⁹

The Move to the Towns 1870 - 1910

During the years immediately following the Civil War the focus of Rockingham County Methodism changed direction. While the pre-war development of the denomination was centered on the county's rural areas the post-war growth was largely in the towns and larger villages. In essence, such was the national trend of Methodism. Originally, Methodism was the "poor people's church," but by the middle of the nineteenth century the denomination had assumed the distinction as America's largest religious body. The leaders in Methodism were also leaders in society. During the period of 1870-1910 not only is the rise of the urban church detectable, but a decline in the rural church is similarly recognized. The means by which the Methodist Church revived in the county following the war have been presented. However, it should be noted that while these means, namely the rise of the auxiliary ministries, resulted in the growth of the urban

church they were also the reasons for which the rural church languished.

At the close of the Civil War in 1865 there were only three settlements of any discernible size: Wentworth, Leaksville and Madison. Although Wentworth and Leaksville were established during the late eighteenth century and Madison by the 1810s, it was not until the years 1836-1843 that the Methodists organized churches in all three towns. The futures of both Rockingham County and the local Methodists were greatly brightened with the construction of the Piedmont Railroad by the Confederate Government during 1862-1864. The railroad was one of the two most vital links between Richmond and Lee's Army on one end and the port cities further south. The Piedmont, a line approximately fifty miles in length connecting Danville, Virginia and Greensboro, North Carolina, crossed the eastern section of Rockingham County promoting growth at any village along the line. At the close of the war there were two main villages along the railroad in Rockingham County: Staceyville (soon to be renamed Ruffin) and Reidsville. Both villages were crossroads hamlets, but the railroad made them centers for trade for eastern Rockingham and western Caswell counties. Reidsville would become the principal county town on the line as, according to tradition, the landowners in Ruffin refused to sell land for developing. Reidsville became the local mecca for tobacco growers and manufacturers. It would be in Ruffin

and Reidsville that the Southern Methodists would make their first significant advances following the war. 10

The origins of the Ruffin Church are somewhat vague at best - extending back to the old Sharon meetinghouse and campground, organized in 1818, just outside of the actual village of Ruffin. When the Sharon congregation died out by the early 1850s the local Methodists worshipped mainly at Union Church in the Mayfield community. No doubt the growth of the village led those adherents in Ruffin to believe that they were able to establish a church there. As early as 1867 quarterly meetings of the Wentworth Circuit were being held occasionally at Ruffin. In August 1871 the Ruffin Church was formally organized with the purchase of a small lot near the railroad on which was constructed a tall, two-story sanctuary the following year. On the first floor of the building was the church sanctuary and the second floor was reserved for the use of the local Masonic lodge, which apparently did not organize. Among the leading members of the Ruffin Church were members of the Holderby, Rawley, Courts, Johnston and Bethell families. Growth at the Ruffin Church was so encouraging that by 1873 the circuit parsonage was moved from Wentworth to Ruffin. No longer was the Wentworth Church the dominant congregation in eastern Rockingham County. Obviously, this move indicates that the Ruffin congregation was strong enough to have the home base of the circuit minister within its midst. Ruffin's day in the sun was short-lived, for in 1879 the parsonage for

the circuit was again moved - this time to Reidsville - Ruffin's successor as the circuit's strongest church. ¹¹

It was not until the early 1870s that Methodists in the Reidsville area experienced the need for a church within the town itself. Salem Church, two miles northwest of Reidsville, served as the base for Methodist worship in the area. The growth of Reidsville following the war and the plans of local Baptists and Presbyterians to organize and build churches there prompted the Methodists to follow suit. A preliminary meeting of Methodists in Reidsville in 1872 led to the organization of a congregation there two years later. Services were held in the town's Baptist and Presbyterian churches until construction was completed on the Methodist's first building. The cornerstone for the brick sanctuary, the county's first brick Methodist edifice, was laid in 1877 during the pastorate of the Rev. V. A. Sharpe and was dedicated in November of the following year. After the removal of the parsonage from Ruffin to Reidsville the adherents in the latter town worked for a division of the circuit so that their parishioners could receive more pastoral attention. In 1881 the North Carolina Annual Conference divided the Wentworth Circuit into two smaller circuits: the Ruffin and Reidsville. Instead of being a point on an eight point charge, Reidsville was now on a four point circuit. Still, Reidsville was not satisfied and petitioned the Annual Conference for station status. In 1885 Conference granted station status to

Reidsville and in December 1886 the Annual Conference convened there for the first time ever in Rockingham County. Within a few years the Reidsville Church would begin the boldest construction project ever for a Methodist congregation in the county - thus establishing a precedent and pattern for some years to come. ¹²

Until about the mid 1880s the Methodists living in Stoneville worshipped at Grogansville Church, a few miles north of town. By 1885 - and some sources say earlier - a society was meeting in Stoneville and on October 2, 1885 the trustees of the Stoneville Methodist Episcopal Church, South purchased a lot on Henry Street. ¹³ Construction on a frame church building commenced immediately. ¹⁴ The Methodists were the first to erect a church in Stoneville, a crossroads village settled before the Civil War, and several would-be congregations from other denominations used the Methodist Church there until they could erect buildings of their own. In 1891 the Roanoke & Southern Railroad, linking Winston (now Winston-Salem), North Carolina and Roanoke, Virginia, was completed and as the line passed through Stoneville new growth was instilled in the village. About this time, Shular T. Hodgkin, the Roanoke & Southern station agent in Stoneville and a Quaker, joined the Methodist Church there and in 1893 organized its first Sunday School. Hodgkin served as Sunday School Superintendent for forty-one years. There were four dominant congregations in Stoneville: the Methodists,

Baptists, Presbyterians and Christians and as no church in town had neither a full-time minister nor services more than once a month the whole church community could worship together at a different church each Sunday. ¹⁵ The minister to the Stoneville Methodists in 1906 could write that:

Methodism is not popular in this section...
Our church building in Stoneville is the oldest and poorest in the town. Our church here has furnished the nest egg for the Episcopalians, the Baptists and the Christians - all of whom have new and tasty edifices and she is now furnishing the nest egg for the Presbyterians, who are laying lumber to build a church... ¹⁶

The Stoneville Church was finally remodeled, but the pastor, Rev. E. P. Green, was not returned for another year at Stoneville. The Rev. Green's complaints regarding the physical condition of his church building were shared by other pastors on multi-church circuits of the day.

While the Stoneville Church was in the developing stages, the Methodists at Grogansville to the north were considering a change of their own. The organization of the Stoneville Church in 1885 and the need of revival within the Grogansville congregation led the latter to accept the offer of area merchant Robert P. Price to relocate their church near his store where he had hoped to develop a thriving village. In 1887 the Grogansville Church was moved north to the Price's Store community on a lot provided by Price. Due to the strong and devoted influence of the circuit pastor,

Rev. Robert P. Troy, the Grogansville congregation was renamed "Troy Church" - a name it maintained until the early 1900s. Finally, the church assumed the same name of the community and was known as Price Church.¹⁷ Rev. E. P. Green, who pastored the Price Church in 1906, wrote that "Our church at Price's Station is old and unviting and should be remodeled or a new one built."¹⁸ The good pastor's wish was granted but not in the manner in which he would have desired. The construction of the railroad through Price placed the church quite close to the line. Sparks from a passing locomotive burned the church to the ground within a few years after Rev. Green's wish for a new building was expressed. Railroad officials paid some \$500.00 for damages and a new sanctuary was erected.¹⁹ Unfortunately, the railroad did not bring significant growth to Price and consequently neither the town nor the Methodist Church would be able to develop as had first been anticipated.

In Ruffin, Reidsville, Stoneville and, to a lesser degree, Price both the community and the Methodist Church profited from the completion of railroads through their respective towns. In Reidsville and Stoneville the railroad brought enough growth to support thriving communities. In older towns, such as Leaksville and Madison connected by railroads in the 1880s, new growth was interjected in both communities and churches. Clearly by the end of the nineteenth century the Methodist denomination was amassing more strength

in the county's towns and as the new century dawned the church was making inroads into the new textile mill communities.

The construction of the Roanoke & Southern Railroad through the Mayo River valley in Rockingham County opened the area to industrial development, further enhanced by the excellent source of water power provided by the river. A Moravian textile entrepreneur from Salem, Col. Francis H. Fries, and other investors established a mill a few miles north of Madison on the west side of the Mayo. A mill village was developed at the site and was incorporated in 1899 as "Mayodan," deriving its name from the nearby confluence of the Mayo and Dan rivers. As early as 1897 Methodists were meeting in Mayodan and the pastor of the Madison Circuit, Rev. Charles F. Sherrill, tried to organize a permanent congregation and build a church there, but these efforts were fruitless. ²⁰ The Mayodan Methodists continued to meet in the local Moravian Church, the only church building in the village of more than 400. In 1900, however, a congregation was organized at Mayodan under the leadership of the Rev. Zadok Paris and in February 1902 purchased a lot at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Main Street. A frame sanctuary was erected during 1902-1903, and was ready for dedication by June 1906. In 1913 a tornado passed through Mayodan and lifted the Methodist Church off its foundations, but the building was repaired and placed back. As early as 1901

a Sunday School was organized at Avalon, another mill community developed at the turn of the century two miles north of Mayodan. The strength of the Moravians at Avalon, the destruction of the Avalon Mill by fire in 1911 and the subsequent removal of all of Avalon's buildings to Mayodan prevented any lasting work there by local Methodists. Though Mayodan was a strong church in a mill village, it would be a few years after unification in 1939 before the church was able to go to station status. 21

Another major area for industrial development in Rockingham County was in the area of the Smith and Dan rivers. A mill settlement on the outskirts of Leaksville developed into the community of Spray, formerly known as Leaksville Factory. The family of Governor John M. Morehead was prominent in the growth of the mill complex and surrounding area. Methodists were meeting in Spray as early as 1899 and had pledged nearly one thousand dollars to build a church. On June 30, 1901 the Spray Church was formally organized with fifty-four charter members. That same year the church negotiated a lease for a lot on Morgan Ford Road on which a handsome frame sanctuary was constructed and dedicated in 1905. The Leaksville and Spray churches were paired off as a separate circuit in 1901, but the Spray Church grew to the extent to request station status from the Annual Conference which was granted in 1904. Much of the success of the Spray Church was attributed to their second pastor, Rev. A. Leland Stanford, a Wentworth

native and an influential leader in the Western North Carolina Conference, who energetically motivated the congregation into duty and service. The Spray sanctuary served the congregation for nearly sixty years, passing into other hands prior to its destruction by fire in 1990. 22

Members of the Spray and Leaksville churches encouraged the formation of a Methodist society in the new mill village of Draper. Draper was established in 1905 as a textile mill village by the German-American Corporation, a few miles northeast of Spray. As early as 1906, Methodists were meeting in Draper and in that same year the Annual Conference set aside the Spray Church and the Draper society as a separate charge. Services at Draper were held in Hundley's Store on Mill Avenue and in November 1907 the church was organized with the purchase of a lot at the corner of Early and Virginia avenues. On this lot was constructed a one-room building for services. This building was used until the first sanctuary was constructed in 1914 at the intersection of Virginia Avenue and Hundley Drive. From 1914-1917 Draper was a station charge and again from 1923 to the present. As the unification of Methodism approached in the late 1930s the Draper congregation made plans to construct a new sanctuary, though it was not until 1949 that the present sanctuary on Main Street was completed. 23

Mayodan, Spray and Draper were examples of Episcopal Methodism in the Southern mill towns of the early 1900s.

They are representative of the post-war revival that swept the South in the urban areas. Unlike the older rural congregations the mill town congregations developed comparatively quickly - some of them achieving station status in less than twenty years after their founding. The mill communities provided a stable flow of members for these congregations. Certainly, these congregations were wholly dependent upon the financial stability of the local mill and its employees, and that in itself was a gamble for the churches themselves. Yet, despite the economically lean years of the 1930s these three churches continued to thrive in the face of rural church decline. The mill community gamble had paid off indeed.

The growth of the town and city churches in the state and the entire conference in general made it increasingly difficult for the North Carolina Conference of the Southern Methodist Church to meet in any one place as a body. Consequently, the General Conference in 1890 approved the division of the North Carolina Conference whereby all churches south and west of the Rockingham-Caswell County line would be placed in the new Western North Carolina Conference. The North Carolina Conference would continue to cover the eastern half of the state. Such divisions were indicative of the growth of the urban churches in the post-war South. ²⁴

Though so much of the early history of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Northern Methodists) in Rockingham County is obscured in mystery, it seems apparent that the first

efforts to organize congregations were made in the towns and villages. All of these congregations were black as the "Northern Methodists" were never successful in organizing a white church in the county. The first of these black churches was Saint Paul in Reidsville, organized in September 1873 with the purchase of a lot on Church Street. ³⁵ The cornerstone for a new frame building was laid on August 15, 1884 during the pastorate of Rev. Wyatt Walker. This sanctuary was used for nearly twenty years. ²⁶ By the mid-1870s the blacks had organized a church at Wentworth, also named St. Paul. It is believed that many of the members of this church were previously enrolled at the Wentworth M.E. Church, South. In 1878 the congregation at Wentworth St. Paul was formally organized when the trustees purchased a lot on the north side of the village on which had been constructed the first of two sanctuaries. ²⁷ On the basis of available information it would appear that the churches at Reidsville and Wentworth, both named St. Paul, were the first black Methodist congregations to be formed in Rockingham County.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century black Methodist congregations were established in the three other towns in the county. Blacks were holding Methodist services in Madison as early as 1879 and shared with other denominations a union church building off Academy Street. In 1890 a congregation was formally organized and was named St.

Stephen's - erecting a frame sanctuary on Wall Street where they remained until the 1920s. Among the charter members of St. Stephen's were Blacks, Cardwells, Daltons, and Scaleses - all of whom, no doubt, were either former slaves of white families with the same names or at least their descendants. St. Stephen's became the dominant black Methodist Episcopal congregation in western Rockingham County.²⁸ In the spring of 1886 blacks in Leaksville organized a Sunday School under the leadership of Raleigh Dillard who formerly attended the white Methodist Church.²⁹ It is believed that this Sunday School led to the creation of St. John's Methodist Episcopal Church by August 1889 at which time the cornerstone for a sanctuary on Hamilton Street was laid.³⁰ Blacks in Stoneville organized the Oak Grove Church in 1900 and during 1903-04 erected the first of two sanctuaries under the leadership of Rev. Dorsey McRae.³¹ Thus, by the beginning of the present century every urban area in Rockingham County possessed a black Methodist congregation.

The Methodist Protestant Church in North Carolina had been throughout most of its history a rural dominated body. In fact, the North Carolina Annual Conference had seemed to be satisfied with that designation and it was not until the 1880s and 1890s that concerted efforts were made in bringing the denomination into the towns and cities in the state. Among the early city or town churches were those at Winston, Henderson, Greensboro, Asheboro, Burlington, and High Point -

all of which were in the Piedmont region.³² The growth of the Methodist Protestants in the urban areas was hampered by the fact that they were usually late arrivals on the scene. Such would certainly prove to be the case in Rockingham County.

The first attempt made by the Methodist Protestant Church to establishing a plant in a Rockingham County town was apparently in Reidsville. The North Carolina Conference had entertained thoughts of organizing a church there as early as 1890 but it was not until 1900 that any deliberate measures were taken in achieving that goal. In January 1900 a lot at the intersection of Piedmont and Wootton streets was purchased for the erection of a church. Apparently, the plans for a church fell through and a congregation was not formally organized.³³ In March 1911, however, a successful venture was launched with the purchase of a lot on Lindsey Street near the heart of the town and less than a block from the formidable Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church, South.³⁴ The Lindsey Street lot was purchased for \$600.00 - half of which was paid for by the Conference Board of Church Extension. The success of the Reidsville project was attributed to the Rev. C.E.M. Raper who was pastor of the Haw River Circuit at the time and the Rev. G.S. Kernodle, a local pastor. During 1911 a frame sanctuary was constructed at the cost of \$6,272.05. The building was occupied the following January and was dedicated in June 1913. Initial growth at

Reidsville was small and slow, but encouraging enough for the 1924 session of the North Carolina Conference to be held there. ³⁵

The last successful venture by the M.P. Church in a Rockingham County town was in Draper in 1921. In April of that year trustees of the Draper Methodist Protestant Church purchased a lot on Merrimon Street. ³⁶ At the 1921 session of the North Carolina Conference the Draper Church reported a membership of seventy, the completion of their sanctuary at a cost of \$1,500, and requested that the congregation be formally received into connection with the conference. The Draper Church never experienced any significant growth due largely to the existence nearby of the Draper Methodist Episcopal Church, South. At the time of Methodist unification in 1939 the congregation reported eighty-seven members. The congregation soon disbanded. ³⁷

The Methodist Protestants were unable to organize another town or village congregation in Rockingham County. During the late 1920s an effort was made to organize a congregation at Ruffin. The presence of the local Southern Methodist Church there, however, negated the need for additional church development and the plans quickly fell through.

Thus, during an approximate fifty-year period, from 1870 to 1920, the focus of local Methodism in Rockingham County had changed direction. It is during this period that the urban congregation comes of age. In the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for example, prior to 1870 there were only three "town" or village congregations: Wentworth, Leaksville, and Madison. By the First World War every town and village in the county possessed Southern Methodist churches and they were the leaders in both financial and membership strength. The "New South" served as the catalyst in the urbanization of the church during the post-war period. The black congregations, conversely, were organized first in the county's towns and villages before those churches in the more rural areas were founded. In this respect their church development differed greatly from that of their white brethren. The end result, however, was that the strongest churches for both whites and blacks were located in the urban areas of Rockingham County. The Methodist Protestants did not make significant efforts to organize churches in towns until the very end of the 1800s - and by that time their efforts were to a large degree thwarted by the more numerous and wealthy Southern Methodists who had already established strong and active congregations. It was obvious that the Southern Methodists were maintaining their status as the leading branch of Methodism in the South and in Rockingham County. This would be even more noticeable and pronounced by the 1939 unification when the administrative

structure of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was the prototype for that of the new Methodist Church.

Maturation of Auxiliary Ministries

During the latter half of the nineteenth century and especially after the Civil War the Methodist Church in the South was undergoing a gradual change. No longer were the churches mere places for weekly or bi-weekly worship. Indeed the church was becoming something much more than that. The church tree was developing new branches into society hoping to maintain the revival fever pitch into the next century. This was the age of the maturation of auxiliary ministries within the Methodist Church. The development of the Sabbath Schools, woman's societies, music ministries and the youth groups all occurred during the last half of the 1800s. Such development was seen as a means of drawing certain members of society into the church family. These ministries were geared to appeal to the children, adult women and men alike and did excel in the more urban areas. The urban areas would be the focal point of the post-war revival within the Methodist denomination.

The churches of the South viewed "professional entertainment" as a serious threat to the spiritual lives of Christians. Therefore, the churches, and especially those in the towns, felt it necessary to offer alternative forms of "respectable" recreation. The church thus became the prime social, as well

as religious, center in most communities by producing both religious reinforcement and "religiously acceptable" social entertainment. Historian Ted Ownby reiterates this theme in his study of Southern evangelical culture:

Southern (rural) evangelicals refrained from anything that might resemble sinfulness while they were on church grounds. The church's own recreational activities were usually designed to have a morally edifying purpose... The only acceptable social recreations were those that met the standards of church and family. The picnics, visiting, and courting in a family setting were the most acceptable secular recreations for evangelicals. ³⁸

Sunday Schools, known earlier as "Sabbath Schools," had originated in the Methodist tradition early in the nineteenth century. The earliest reference to Sunday Schools for Methodists in Rockingham County is dated 1851 for the Wentworth Southern Methodist Circuit. At that time there were five Southern Methodist Sunday Schools in the county with a combined total of 115 "scholars." Within four years the number of scholars had tripled. The war years had a demoralizing effect upon the schools, but they quickly rebounded, for by 1872 there were 627 enrolled in the Southern Methodist Sunday Schools in the county as opposed to 160 just ten years before. Throughout the 1800s it was not at all uncommon for circuits to have a combined Sunday School membership exceeding four hundred. ³⁹

What was the necessity of the Sunday School? Basically, the schools were intended to reinforce the principles children

were taught in the home. Rev. Numa Reid wrote that the duty of the school was to "...blend virtue and intelligence rightly, and give tone, and character, and the right direction, to public opinion." ⁴⁰ Reid concluded that the Sunday Schools were the unifying bond between Methodism and other Protestant denominations and the foundation for Christian stewardship. The need for the Sunday School was clearly more evident in the circuit churches. Parents and ministers realized that children needed weekly instruction in the Bible that could not be accomplished by sermons heard no more than twice a month - a more pronounced emphasis was needed for the youth. Sunday Schools were held usually every Sunday in the churches regardless of the preaching schedule. In the more rural charges classes would be suspended during the winter months due to the cold weather and poor road conditions. Sunday School sessions consisted of somewhat rigorous training in Bible verses and catechisms. The adults, some of whom were lukewarm to the concept, concerned themselves more with Bible study. Although intended for both adults and children alike, the Sunday Schools were primarily seen as tools for the instruction of children.

Sunday Schools were also a means of socializing and in many cases attended by members from two or more different denominations. In Wentworth there existed a "Union Sunday School" made up of Methodists and Presbyterians. Much was the same case in Madison where the Methodist Sunday School

was presided over by Superintendent Thomas M. Woodburn. Woodburn's granddaughter, Miss Nancy Watkins, recalled her grandfather's activities in Madison Sunday School noting that the school was a cog in the wheel of small-town society in Victorian America:

Mr. Woodburn served in every helping office, except that of pastor: Superintendent of the Sunday School, being the first to keep that operating during the winter months by going in the afternoon, opening the church, building two fires, ringing the bell to call attention, to come and study the Bible at two o'clock. It became a town fashion for all denominations to attend the Methodist Sunday School on Academy Street then go for social calls, or walks to the mineral springs, hasten home and get supper and chores over, and get to some one of the three churches (Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist) for evening services by "early candle light," or its announced equivalent. Mr. Woodburn always prayed the prayer for Sunday School... He kept the key to the book case which held the Sunday School library and entered into a book the name of each book and borrower. ⁴¹

Two activities connected to the Sunday School promoted Christian fellowship within the community. One of the most popular events in the churches was the annual Children's Day exercises, held usually in June, which consisted of worship, recitations, singing and examples of elocution by the young people. Such programs often concluded with picnics which were popular with young and old alike. The Sunday School picnic often included various recreational diversions such as croquet, baseball, sack racing and marbles. In essence, the Sunday School was in many cases throughout the South the

principal means of Christian fellowship and recreation.

Rockingham County was certainly no exception to this case. 42

Few churches, rural or urban, were fortunate enough to have classroom space at the church. In this respect the old Asbury tradition of a simple and basic church sanctuary remained visible. The usual arrangement consisted of classes occupying a designated area of the sanctuary, such as the gallery or choir loft. Sometimes curtains were used to partition off areas in the one-room building. It was difficult for scholars to maintain sole attention upon their own teachers and lessons without becoming distracted by the other classes nearby. By about 1900 the town churches realized the need for classrooms and the new sanctuaries constructed in the county at that time reflected the need and met them. The rural churches were somewhat later in realizing the need for classroom space. As the Methodist unification of 1939 approached the small rural churches were beginning to build additions to their existing buildings. The Sunday School had come of age in Southern Methodism.

Another major development within the Methodist Church during the late 1800s was the rise of women in responsible positions in the congregations. Women, the "guardians of virtue," had long played supportive roles in the church, but such roles did not include holding offices within the congregation. More women than men attended church and especially Sunday School. While it would be the twentieth century

before women would be permitted to hold church offices and exert their influence, the first positive step in that direction evolved during the post-Civil War years.⁴³ During these years there existed in many Methodist churches informally organized ladies' aid societies, which assisted the congregation in countless ways ranging from raising funds for church and parsonage improvements to promoting Bible study. Gradually, women became interested in mission work - a touchstone of Methodism - and desired to establish groups that would promote interest in that field. In 1878 the Woman's (Foreign) Missionary Society of the North Carolina Conference of the Southern Methodist Church was organized to stimulate interest in foreign missions. With the division of the North Carolina Conference and the creation of the Western North Carolina Conference in 1890 a separate foreign missionary society was formed for the new conference. Rockingham County was the northeast corner of the new Western North Carolina Conference. Local church chapters of the Woman's Society were being organized throughout the state, among the earliest ones were groups at Reidsville (1885) and Leaksville (1887).⁴⁴

The need for a formal organization of women relative to home missions was met in 1901 with the creation of the Western North Carolina Conference Woman's Home Mission Society. The local chapters of this organization were concerned largely with charitable causes of the immediate

church community as well as fulfilling the physical needs for the church and parsonage buildings. Only large congregations were able to have enough women to merit the existence of two missionary societies. Consequently, the Western North Carolina Conference Foreign and Home Mission societies were merged in 1912 to become the Woman's Missionary Society. The chief goals of the society were centered upon mission work support and awareness. The ladies' aid society continued to exist as the major tool for local church projects. Among the county's churches that had early active societies were Ruffin (c. 1893), Bethlehem (1909), Madison (1910) and Salem (1912). 45

The support that these women's societies rendered the local church is incalculable and this support came in varying forms. The Victorian "lawn party" was a favorite institution of the southern Protestant church as was noted in an announcement of the efforts of the Ruffin Church Ladies' Aid Society:

June 29, 1906- The ladies of Ruffin will give a lawn party on July 4, at five o'clock p.m. Let everybody who wishes to have a good time and close the day's activities in a grand climax wind up at Ruffin. That Brunswick Stew, ice cream and other nice things will keep you in a good humor with yourself for at least a month. Do not think for a moment it will be a tame affair and the soup insipid. The Ruffin ladies don't do anything by halves. The proceeds go to help finish the new Methodist Church. 46

The lawn party was not the only means in which the women's societies raised needed funds. In Reidsville, the

society at Main Street Church was widely noted for their annual Chrysanthemum Show and bazaar. In Wentworth, where the ladies in both the Methodist and Presbyterian churches met together as one group, the society presented plays and canvassed the county as an amateur theatrical troupe during the early 1900s. The society there also served meals and drinks to those who were attending court in the small county seat.⁴⁷ Obviously, the ladies were an innovative group whose ideas and hard work greatly lifted the financial load of even the smallest of churches. Clearly, the women's societies constituted the most important sub-group within the average congregation - a status that is maintained even today in the present United Methodist Church.

Perhaps one of the lesser known functions of the local church during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries involved the young people. Originally organized under the auspices of the women's societies, youth organizations were created as a bolster to the Sunday Schools in maintaining the interest of young people in church-related activities. The scarcity of adequate records prevents a complete view of Methodist youth activities in Rockingham County. These societies flourished just before the turn of the century and for some years thereafter. Such organizations were often brief in duration for no congregation had a constant supply of young people to replace the older ones who had "aged out" of the society. Youth groups were constantly

being reorganized whenever there were enough people to merit it.

One of the strongest centers for youth activity was the Reidsville Methodist Church (renamed Main Street Church by 1892). About 1885 a group of children, led by Mrs. David R. Bruton (the pastor's wife), organized the "Light Bearers" society whose main interest was mission work. The "Bright Jewels" was another organization, similar in nature to the Light Bearers, in which mission work was studied and supported. Evidence suggests that the county's first Epworth League was organized in Reidsville at Main Street Church in 1899. The Epworth League was a group of teenage youth, both male and female, whose interests ranged from missionary work to Bible study and fund-raising projects.⁴⁸ Some Epworth Leagues also included young adults and married couples. Among the several Epworth Leagues or youth groups organized in the county were those at Leaksville (1902), Bethlehem (c. 1910), Spray (1916), Mt. Carmel (c. 1923), Madison (1926), Wentworth (1928) and Lowe's (1928). It was, however, in the towns that the youth groups, regardless of the name, thrived and contributed heavily to the overall church program.

Epworth or Young People leagues continued to thrive in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South through the 1930s. The advent of the Second World War and the subsequent draft sounded the death knell for youth and young adult groups and it would be some years before such activity could be revived

to the pre-war level. What was significant about these youth groups was that they were excellent training grounds for future leaders in the church. Indeed, among many leaders of local congregations in Rockingham County today are former members of the Epworth or similar leagues.

Music has always played an integral part in the overall Methodist rise to prominence. While certainly not as prolific in music composition as Moravians, Lutherans, and Episcopalians, Methodists were much renowned for their proficiency in verse. This tradition can be traced back to John Wesley, a translator of Moravian hymns, and his more capable brother Charles, Methodism's greatest hymn writer. In all early Methodist societies all singing was unaccompanied - there were no organs or choirs. Such instruments were not in keeping with the Asbury adaptation of Wesleyanism. In his in-depth study of early American Methodism, William H. Williams provides some insight into the importance of singing in the Methodist faith:

(T)he Methodists emphasized hymn singing more than perhaps any other Christian faith of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Vocal music... raised the worshipper's mind from earthly things and prepared it to receive the gospel. To itinerants, however, the hymns represented much more; they enticed music lovers to Methodist meetings, and they became a very significant aid in teaching Methodist theology... At first, hymn books were rare... and the itinerants "lined out" the hymn- that is, they would sing a line and the audience would repeat it... (S)ometimes the singing was too (disorganized) to suit Methodist

leaders, and itinerants were directed to have practice sessions with the people to improve their efforts. These Methodist hymns reflected... the strongly democratic nature of Wesleyan theology in its promise of salvation to the poor as well as the rich, to blacks as well as whites. 49

Singing institutes were common in Rockingham County among Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists and Christians and were continued in some form on into the 1930s.

During the nineteenth century Methodist hymnody underwent a gradual evolution. The popular "campmeeting" songs were gradually weeded out of most hymnals as the years passed by. Moreover, following the Civil War the organ was introduced to many Methodist churches. Huge pipe organs adorned city sanctuaries while the smaller town or rural churches possessed reed organs (more commonly known as "pump organs"). Not all congregations welcomed the advent of the organ to their local church. When the Leaksville (Southern Methodist) Church installed their first pump organ following the Civil War "'some of the older members of the church were violently opposed to bringing any kind of musical instrument into the church, and for a time they refused to attend services. However, their prejudices soon gave way to a spirit of appreciation.'" 50 Hymn tunes selected were becoming more sophisticated and each successive Methodist hymnal reflected that change. Choirs were being organized in the town churches throughout the late nineteenth century and it was not at all unusual for congregations to hear selections by Handel, Bach

or Haydn for the first time in their area at their local Methodist church. Church music was quickly becoming an inspiring aspect of Methodist worship and was instrumental in the revival movement of the post-war years.

Rural churches were also a part of this development in church music. During the late 1800s the "tune raiser" was replaced by the "pump" organ and the organist. In churches without organs the singing continued unaccompanied. Tradition in the Salem Church, near Reidsville, relates that prior to 1895 a local resident brought her guitar to the service to lead in the singing. There were no complaints regarding her playing but members did not feel that a guitar was a proper and "fit" instrument to play in a church. The congregation went back to using the "tune raiser" until an organ could be purchased. In the rural churches, too, refinement in church music was developing. By the end of the First World War the less versatile piano was quickly replacing the "old-fashioned" and outmoded pump organ. 51

Only in the larger towns of Leaksville and Reidsville were the Methodists able to possess outstanding pipe organs. In 1914 the Main Street Church in Reidsville acquired a "hand pumped" pipe organ through the generosity of business tycoon and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie and other individuals. 52 In 1928 the Leaksville Church purchased a six-rank Moller pipe organ for fifteen hundred dollars from a church in Mississippi. The instrument was disassembled and

shipped to Leaksville by rail. Both pipe organs at Reidsville and Leaksville were used until the 1950s when they were replaced by newer models. With superior instruments and trained musicians these two churches ranked among the state's leading Methodist congregations in musical versatility and performance. ⁵³

The refinement of church music within the Methodist tradition was another example of the trend opposite the Asbury method of simplicity and modesty. As architecture in churches was shifting away from the Asbury precepts, so too was the music in the congregations. Methodism had indeed become dependent upon the "wealthy and powerful" whom Asbury cautioned against. Methodism had assumed a course from which it would neither turn nor retreat.

The history of the black Methodist Episcopal Church experience in North Carolina is still so largely unknown that historians are often left conjecturing its origins and activities. Regarding the auxiliary ministries within the church the larger churches, especially those in the towns, had women's home missionary societies as early as 1905 when the conference society was organized. ⁵⁴ The black Methodist women in North Carolina concentrated their efforts in the home missions field rather than in the foreign field. Projects, such as those involving Bennett College for black women in nearby Greensboro and the continued support of that institution were primary concerns for the Methodist Episcopal

Church in the North Carolina Conference. St. Stephen's Church in Madison had one of the earliest women's societies among the black churches in the area shortly after the turn-of-the-century with Mrs. Mary J. Franklin as president.⁵⁵ St. Paul's Church in Reidsville was making moves to organize its first woman's society at the time of Methodist unification in 1939. That congregation had organized an Epworth League for the young people during the Depression under the leadership of Rev. W. T. Lomax.⁵⁶ In the smaller rural congregations it is quite likely that there was insufficient support for the existence of societies and leagues within the congregations. This was not at all uncommon to small black or white congregations where the memberships were in decline.

Little information is available on the auxiliary ministries within the Methodist Protestant Church in Rockingham County. Sunday Schools, youth groups and women's societies were all facets of the Methodist Protestant faith and yet they were usually small in number and late coming into existence comparatively speaking. Statistics available are not specific enough to determine the actual strength of any of the auxiliary ministries in Rockingham County. The fact that most of the denomination's congregations in the county were rural and small would contribute to the lack of information. The Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the North Carolina Conference was organized at Grace Church in Greensboro in 1900 and the Home Missionary Society was organized eight

years later. The Reidsville Church appears to have been perhaps the only congregation in the county in which an actual branch of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society existed and that was around 1917. Once Methodist unification was achieved in 1939 the Methodist Church made some efforts in assisting small rural churches in organizing auxiliary groups within the congregation.

The development of the auxiliary ministries within local Methodism was directly connected with the expansion of the church into the more populated areas in the South. Only in the towns and cities were the congregations strong enough to sponsor such expanded church activity to such a great degree. In the towns there was denominational competition to motivate churches into developing new outlets for "religious recreation." Churches were judged, as they continue to be today, by the number of programs they sponsored outside of the regular worship service. The church filled a void in the lives of its parishioners that was not entirely spiritual in nature. As in the country, the local church provided the home base for urban socializing and was quickly becoming a pivotal force in American homelife. The rise of the auxiliary ministries would provide the local church with a buffer from harsh reality once the evangelistic era in Methodism waned. Moreover, these activities provided a new foundation for the future church. Youth were being familiarized with the actual operation of the church at a far younger age

than had their forebearers. Women had also begun to take a much more public supporting role in the overall church program. While the men had been the dominant force within the local church prior to 1900, they would soon be replaced by the increasing activities of the women. In essence the local church, in larger towns, was quickly developing into an industry of sorts in which salvation was manufactured and made available to a wider range of people within society and in various different forms.

Local Methodists and Prohibition

Another factor in the popularity of Methodism during the late nineteenth century was the indifference of the church to theological disputes. This indifference, seen by outsiders as a disadvantage, made Methodism more acceptable to a wider range of beliefs and backgrounds. Unlike the Baptists and Presbyterians who divided over theological and social issues, the Methodists pooled their resources together to unite in the fight against what they perceived to be the greatest moral evil facing America - alcohol. From the smallest to the wealthiest of congregations, Methodists came together on the issue of drink and became the standard bearers for the Prohibition Movement. Abstinence from alcohol had always been a requirement for membership in the Methodist faith. Only in cases of medicinal need was the use of alcohol permissible. During the early days of Methodism local temperance societies

were organized within congregations, but it was not until after Reconstruction that a concerted effort was made by Methodists to rid society of alcohol.

It is during the 1880s that we find the first reference in Rockingham County of Methodist activity regarding prohibition. A leader of the "Drys" in Rockingham County was the Rev. Robert Preston Troy (1838-1899), pastor of the Madison Circuit. Due to the efforts of Rev. Troy and others, Madison voted dry during the election of 1886. Meanwhile, Reidsville remained wet by a vote of 257 to 181. This did not deter Troy and other Methodist ministers in the county. A few weeks following the June election, Rev. Troy and a Quaker pastor, Mrs. Nelle Moon, toured Rockingham County, preaching to large crowds in Madison, Wentworth and Reidsville. Prohibition was expounded at each preaching point during the tour and a number of conversions were garnered. Rev. Troy, Mrs. Moon, and the Reidsville Methodist minister, Rev. David R. Bruton worked long and hard for the Temperance cause. When Reidsville voted again for prohibition in 1887 the "dry" forces won by a majority vote of fifty. The entire state, however, remained "wet" as a whole, having defeated state-wide prohibition in 1881. 57

One outlet for Methodist temperance activity was through the Independent Order of Good Templars. This society was first organized in New York state in 1851 and the first chapter in North Carolina was established in 1872. The

leaders in the Good Templars usually "stressed the moral and religious phases of temperance." One of the first chapters of the Good Templars organized in Rockingham County was at Madison in May 1873. Among the officers of the Madison society was the Rev. Frank L. Reid, pastor of the Madison Circuit. Within two years other chapters were established at Wentworth, Reidsville, and Ellisboro. Membership in the Good Templars was open to both males and females. The local societies of the Good Templars were of fairly brief duration, lasting only a few short years. 58

Madison was an interesting example of Methodist prohibitionist activity. In 1901 the town had voted to repeal prohibition. In 1907 the issue surfaced once again with the Madison Methodist Church divided over the issue. Disregarding Methodist policy on alcohol, three leaders of the Madison Church: Mayor Charles O. McMichael, J. O. Ragsdale and J. M. Vaughn led the local "wet" forces. Opposing them were their pastor Rev. D. P. Tate, and fellow church members R. P. Webster, G. W. Martin, B. F. McGehee, John O. Busick and Ben M. Cahill. The "wet" forces won again in Madison, but their victory was short-lived for the state-wide referendum loomed ahead. 59

The state-wide referendum on prohibition in May 1908 attracted much interest among Methodists in Rockingham County. The chairman of the Rockingham County Prohibition League was attorney and Superior Court Judge Henry P. Lane, an active

member of the Leaksville Methodist Church. Leading the anti-Prohibition forces was State Senator Reuben David Reid of Wentworth, whose wife, Lucile Reid, was the granddaughter of the Rev. Numa F. Reid. Rev. Reid was the county's leading Methodist of his day and a noted advocate of Temperance. The contest was fierce and close - the prohibitionists carried the county by 138 votes. The state-wide race was clearly a "dry" victory by a vote of 113,612 to 69,416. The standard bearer for the North Carolina Prohibitionists was Governor Robert B. Glenn, a native of Rockingham County. North Carolina was the first state to adopt Prohibition by a direct vote of the people. While the subsequent battles over Prohibition and repeal would once again pull Methodists into the thick of the fighting, the movement in Rockingham County was thereafter a mere shadow of the fierce campaigns of the 1880s and early 1900s. Methodists were becoming more tolerant of the use of alcohol though the official policy of abstinence remained the same. 60

The Methodists in Rockingham County were never able to unite again in a social movement as they had for Prohibition, opting instead for taking middle-of-the-road positions on issues. When the issue of drink surfaced again during the early 1930s, the Methodists were much more concerned over the recent collapse of the national economy. The practical living of the Christian life had historically "meant more to Methodists than hair-splitting theological discussions."

Consequently, members of the three branches of North Carolina Methodism paid comparatively little attention to other societal debates of the day such as evolution. ⁶¹ Methodist union and church growth were obviously of more importance to the masses within the congregations and those in ecclesiastical authority. Thus, the crusade against alcohol was the last for Methodists in Rockingham County. From now on local Methodists directed their attentions more to problems within the church.

In retrospect, the revival and expansion of Methodism in post-war Rockingham County was made possible for several reasons. The protracted meetings, or revivals, strengthened not only existing congregations, but also brought the church into the new industrial areas. The rise of the auxiliary ministries, within the urban areas primarily, turned the church into a local social mecca and involved children and females in church functions for the first time. The Methodist doctrine of abstinence from alcohol led the churches to guide the Temperance bandwagon and appeal to the masses outside the sanctuary walls. The Methodists firmly believed that their efforts on behalf of Prohibition prevented many broken homes and converted numerous lost souls. By taking the moderate position on theological issues, Methodists were able to prevent additional schisms within the fold and, therefore, appeal to a wide range of people and preferences. These and other efforts evidently paid sound dividends for in 1878 there were, for example, 1,162 Southern Methodists in Rockingham County

and sixty years later - on the eve of unification - there were at least four times that number. The years between the Civil War and the First World War were the more productive and energetic for Methodists in Rockingham County, and the churches of today are the clear results of those blessings of abundance.

CHAPTER VII

POST-WAR METHODISM AND THE LOCAL RURAL CHURCH

It cannot be emphasized often enough that the post-war revival within Methodism in Rockingham County was largely limited to the urban areas. The rural churches for the most part continued to exist, and the revival movement did indeed bring some added support and interest. However, any gains made there were offset by the regional decline of rural congregations in both membership and finances. While auxiliary ministries, such as women's societies, youth leagues and Sunday Schools existed in the rural churches, on the whole they lacked both the numerical and financial superiority of the larger city churches and, therefore, it was a tremendous task to keep such activities functioning. Consequently, there existed considerable indifference to Sunday Schools and mission work, especially longtime interests of the mainline church. The growth of the county's industrial areas took many potential farmers away from their native communities and the rural church would languish because of it. In light of these obstacles, only in southern Rockingham County did Methodism successfully promote the organization of new churches during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The story of the rural Methodist church during this period in Rockingham County is one of modest subsistence counterbalanced by the growth of the urban church.

It is ironic that the very activities that bolstered the urban Methodist Church during the post-war years could have made similar progress in the rural church, and yet the latter was lukewarm to most auxiliary ministries. Why this indifferent attitude on the part of the rural church has been difficult for historians to ascertain. Clearly, the morale of the country church had been crushed during the war and the growth of towns at the expense of the rural communities were all factors in the malaise that did exist. An excellent example of this indifference existed on the Ruffin Circuit, which included the Southern Methodist charges in northeastern Rockingham County. Each succeeding minister to that multi-church circuit was beset with the same problems: indifferent congregations, weak Sunday Schools, and a lack of willingness to try new things.

As a case example, Ruffin was representative of other small towns or rural areas suffering from the post-war malaise. Baptist evangelist S. F. Conrad wrote in 1894 that Ruffin consisted of "many DEAD-HEAD CHRISTIANS ... who are in collusion with whiskey and the devil, which makes the work hard as to reaching the unsaved... The community is cursed by a number of scalawags and ruffians..."¹ In his report to the Ruffin Circuit Quarterly Conference in March 1895, Methodist minister Rev. J. B. Tabor, Sr. remarked that: "'A Methodist Church without a Sunday School is a failure... Some of our people are making progress in the religious life,

but many have only the form of godliness without its power and some, I am sorry to say, have not even the form of godliness.'" ² Rev. Tabor was determined to develop interest in the Sunday Schools on the Ruffin Circuit and within a two-year period (1894-1896) the number of Sunday Schools on the circuit increased from two to six and the number of scholars likewise from 111 to 400. ³ Yet the schools fell into decay after Rev. Tabor was assigned elsewhere. The rural churches took little interest in mission work. The typical response to the annual questioning by the district superintendent of church officials concerning the efforts made by the local congregations in the field of missions was "Nothing new to report." This constant retort kindled a spark within Ruffin's ministers, especially after the turn-of-the-century, and through their efforts and the "missionary institutes" held at Ruffin and other area churches enough interest was developed to foster the formation of women's missionary societies there.

Another reason for the decline of many rural churches was the migration of many large families to nearby towns. Those churches close to growing towns felt this migration most keenly. Salem Church, two miles northwest of Reidsville, was a case in point. With the founding of the Reidsville M.E. Church, South in 1874 the nearby Salem Church was closed and most of its membership enrolled at Reidsville. In 1891 enough interest was revived to reopen Salem Church and erect

within a few months the present frame sanctuary. During the early 1900s, however, the young adult members and their families were gradually moving from Salem to Reidsville or other nearby towns. These people, in turn, joined churches in which the auxiliary ministries excelled and grew. This exodus at the Salem Church was more pronounced with the development of nearby Chingua-Penn Plantation. Tobacco businessman T. Jefferson Penn acquired property in the area and amassed a fine dairy farm and estate. Penn's expansion of his estate uprooted at least ten local farm families in the Salem Church area. The employees at Penn's estate and dairy were largely imported from Northern states and were neither Methodists nor took an active role in community affairs. This drain upon the Salem Church membership was great, compounded when Mr. Penn offered to purchase the church building and turn it into a community center. Salem Church officials promptly declined the offer, but the congregation had been dealt a near fatal blow and only the dedication of a few loyal members would save it from total extinction. ⁴

With the arrival of the twentieth century the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was quickly becoming a denomination in Rockingham County that was controlled and dominated by the "town" churches. Numerous attempts were made to organize rural congregations throughout the county during the first four decades of the present century, but such attempts were only moderately successful. The breaking up of the

traditionally large farm families, the exodus of young people to the cities and the dying out of principal families in the local congregations nearly sounded the death knell for the rural Methodist Church in Rockingham County.

In the eastern half of Rockingham County little progress was made in the formation of new churches. An attempt to organize one in the Shady Grove area south of Wentworth in the 1870s amounted to little though the site remained a preaching point for local Methodist ministers until the First World War. In 1902 and 1903 Methodist classes were organized in the Groom's and Lennox Castle communities respectively, but neither group - both east of Reidsville - survived more than a few years. By the end of the First World War the Penile Church at Lawsonville had collapsed as the membership there had dwindled to only a few. Even the Ware's Chapel congregation in Reidsville, organized in 1892 by rural arrivals to the newly developed mill community was closed by the end of the first decade of the new century. The only significant rural congregation in eastern Rockingham County to be organized at this time was the Hickory Grove congregation in early 1892 east of Mayfield in the northeastern section of the county. The first years of Hickory Grove were extremely difficult and by the First World War the congregation was on the verge of collapse. During the pastorate of Rev. H. F. Starr (1920-1924) the Sunday School at Hickory Grove was reorganized and the church was revived to the extent that a new church was

constructed in the 1930s. Even with this somewhat optimistic note the prospects for continued growth of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in eastern Rockingham County as far as rural churches were concerned were dim indeed. ⁵

In addition to the southwestern and eastern sections of the county as areas for church growth potential the northwestern section was viewed as "virgin territory." During the mid 1800s the only rural Southern Methodist congregation in northwestern Rockingham County was the Wesley Chapel Church near the Dan River - between Stoneville and Wentworth. By the 1880s the sixty-year old congregation was but a shell of its former self as members moved out of the sparsely settled area. In 1899 the remaining few members of Wesley Chapel relocated to a site a few miles away adjacent to the Settle plantation in the Settle's Bridge community. The new church was named "Mulberry Island" in honor of the nearby plantation, then owned by the Trogdon family who were leaders in the congregation. ⁶ A frame sanctuary with bell tower was constructed in 1901 and served the congregation until just after the First World War. By this time the Mulberry Island Church was struggling for survival and in attempt to revive the congregation a move to a more prominent location on the Wentworth-Stoneville Road was approved, a new church was built in 1921 and the congregation was renamed "Centenary." ⁷ An attempt to organize a church in the Grassy Springs area east of Stoneville prior to the First World War was a failure,

while the Dan Valley congregation - organized just north of Madison in 1921 - lasted for nearly twenty-five years before disbanding. Other developments in northwestern Rockingham County included the moving of the Mt. Hermon congregation over the county line from Stokes County in 1909, and the founding of the Matthews Chapel Church, west of Price, by former members of the Stoneville Church in 1938. Nevertheless, the churches in the area that survived were destined to remain small rural congregations.

Protestants in the rural South before and after the Civil War viewed the Sunday worship service as the principal reinforcement of religious beliefs and sentiments.⁸ Rural churches, especially Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian, were numerous with mostly small memberships. Most churches in the country and in small towns were originally on multi-church circuits which prevented many congregations from having more than two services a month. Consequently, it was possible for the entire Christian community within a local area to worship in a different church each Sunday. In Rockingham County this practice was most evident in Wentworth, Leaksville, Madison, and Stoneville. Historian Ted Ownby sheds additional light upon this ecumenical practice:

The ease with which Southern evangelicals moved among churches of different denominations suggests more than the obvious fact that rural churchgoers wanted to attend as many services as possible. Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and many members of smaller denominations saw in each other far more similarities than differences. Even if

Presbyterians tended to be wary of the emotionalism of the other denominations, they all shared the same moral beliefs. This common ground helped make the moral attitudes of Southern evangelism the accepted morality of the region. Even if many Southerners often deviated from that moral code, virtually everyone had the same ideas about what was right and wrong. Under those standards, it was certainly possible to be a sinner but almost impossible to reject evangelical standards altogether.⁹

Alberta Ratliffe Craig, a member of Wentworth's leading Presbyterian family writing in the 1930s, recalled the religious environment in the state's smallest county seat during the late nineteenth century:

There were two churches in Wentworth (for whites), Methodist and Presbyterian; and as there were only one or two services a month in each, the same congregation worshiped in both churches.

The Methodist Church was at the extreme western end of the village, and to go there on a dark night was a walk by faith.

The Presbyterian Church was in the center of town, not far from the courthouse square. The sweet-toned old bell, the same smooth plastered walls, the organ, and stove that never heated the old building are there yet.

A Sabbath in old Wentworth is a memory revered. No music but sacred music was permitted the young people. They often sang, but everything was of a spiritual nature. No secular newspapers were read, but church papers were provided. There were catechisms to be studied. There were few hot meals. We firmly believed the old saying, "A Sabbath well spent brings a week of content," or, on the contrary, "Safety seek, for the devil will tempt you all next week."¹⁰

The strict religious emanation in Wentworth on Sundays lasted throughout the remainder of the week and influenced many activities as Mrs. Craig remembered:

A "Sociable" was a party without dancing. This latter being so heartily condemned by the elders, games were substituted that required just as much jumping about, if less skill. The music consisted of hand clapping and singing as they played "Steal Partners," "Husco Ladies Turn," and other motion games.

There were occasional dances, but they were heartily condemned, so that youth taking part in such dissipation as a square dance, not to mention the waltz, was shockingly out of favor with his elders!

School (which for Mrs. Craig was in the Wentworth Female Seminary located in the local Masonic Lodge) began in the morning by each child's reading in rotation, verses of a chapter in the New Testament, followed by prayer by the teacher, and ending by all repeating the Lord's Prayer in concert. Later in the year we learned whole chapters and recited them "by heart."

The practice of "ecumenical sharing" of local churches waned during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as congregations grew in numbers and resources to allow more frequent services. By the 1920s only Wentworth and Stoneville were continuing this practice, but for a few years longer. Sadly, an interesting feature of worship in rural^s and small town churches in the South had vanished and the ecumenical feelings once shared by local churches had thus languished.

Only in southern Rockingham County did Methodism achieve reasonable success in organizing new congregations. Southern Rockingham County was almost exclusively rural with a handful of hamlets and crossroads communities. Moreover, those living in this half of the county were likely several miles from one of the larger towns and farming remained the basic means of survival. All three branches of Methodism were

active in promoting growth in this area during the period 1870-1900. The results were numerous small community churches - nearly all of which survive to the present day. The Southern and Northern Methodists had much to reap in this area of the county; only one church of the former branch and none of the latter existed in that section prior to the 1870s. Only the Methodist Protestants, who had congregations scattered along the lower third of the county, were well established in the area.

In 1870 the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South appointed the Rev. Frank Lewis Reid to the Madison Circuit. Frank Reid was the son of the Rev. Dr. Numa Fletcher Reid (1825-1873), the county's leading Methodist. The Madison Circuit was Frank Reid's first appointment as a Methodist minister and during his three-year pastorate the churches on the charge experienced much revival in strength and numbers. Together Reid and a local pastor, Rev. Elisha J. Eudaily (1826-1894), held revivals at designated spots in the area south of Madison.¹² By 1874 two preaching points had been established in this former "barren land." Eden Church was formally organized in May 1874 with the purchase of a two-acre tract on the road "leading from Moore's Mill to Rocky Springs" and was located a couple of miles west of present-day Ellisboro community.¹³ A frame sanctuary was dedicated in 1875 and was destroyed by fire in November 1886. A second sanctuary was constructed

in 1887 and the present fieldstone building was dedicated in 1935. 14

At about the same time Eden was organized another preaching point was established, near Pine Hall supposedly, and was named Mt. Zion. In 1883 the Mt. Zion trustees purchased a site halfway between Ellisboro and Stokesdale in the Rocky Springs community and there erected a one-room frame building in 1885. This frame sanctuary, measuring twenty-six by forty feet, was dedicated in March 1886 during the pastorate of the Rev. R. M. Stafford of the Dan River Mission Circuit. The present Mt. Zion building dates from 1925. Together the Eden and Mt. Zion churches provided meeting places for Southern Methodists south of Madison, but both congregations experienced somewhat slow growth during the late nineteenth century. 15

To the immediate south of Madison Methodists were meeting as early as 1887 in a log meetinghouse on the lands of the Payne family. Dr. William A. Payne and his wife Grace Moore Payne were instrumental in bringing the congregation, known as Mount Tabor, into being. In 1899 the Paynes deeded a lot on the "(Revolutionary War) Baggage Road" to the trustees of Mt. Tabor and shortly thereafter the present sanctuary was erected. For many years Mt. Tabor, Mt. Zion and Eden churches were on the Stokesdale Circuit. 16

The founding of the Glencoe Church ended the initial development of the Southern Methodist Church in southwestern

Rockingham County. A tent revival held in the Witty's Crossroads community, south of Bethany, in 1902 led to the organizing of Glencoe Church in November 1903. The first sanctuary was constructed adjacent to the Glencoe public school. Many Methodist churches during the nineteenth century were constructed near schools and likewise many public schools were located near Methodist churches. Glencoe Church has sent some seven men into the ministry - most of them Methodist. ¹⁷

In looking back at the development of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in southwestern Rockingham County between 1873-1903, it is obvious that this period was the last in which the rural congregations in the county were flourishing to the extent that new churches were being organized. The twentieth century would bring the test by which many of the rural churches survived, but also several would fade into obscurity.

During the 1880s and 1890s practically all the rural black Methodist Episcopal congregations that survive today in Rockingham County were organized. The earliest reference to Wesley Chapel Church, south of Reidsville and near the Mizpah M.P. Church, is dated 1882 and it appears in the minutes of the North Carolina Conference for the first time in 1884. Between 1882 and 1925 the church made five separate purchases of adjoining properties which largely constitute the present church site today. The cornerstone on the present building is dated 1898. ¹⁸ Withers' Chapel Church was organized in

1888 in the Huntsville Township and was originally known as "Warren's Chapel" probably for Lewis Warren, a trustee in the church. Shortly after 1900 the congregation moved to a site in southeastern Stokes County.¹⁹ Hayes' Chapel Church, southeast of Madison near Intelligence, was active as early as 1890 when the trustees purchased property on the Madison-Greensboro Road.²⁰ Chapel Hill Church, just west of Monroeton on the Flat Rock Road, was in existence as early as 1881.²¹ Its membership was largely made up of former slaves in the area. Garrett's Grove Church was established in 1896 in extreme southeastern Rockingham County on the former site of a public school for blacks.²² The cemetery at Garrett's Grove contains graves as early as 1902. Mount Zion Church, west of Wentworth, was organized in 1899 and remained active until about 1920 at which time the congregation was known as "Settle's" for a prominent family in the church.²³ Consequently, all of the rural black congregations in the county predate 1900 and all but Mt. Zion remain in existence today.

While the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was enjoying sound growth in Rockingham County, the Methodist Protestant brethren were having a difficult time in maintaining strength and identity. The latter branch of Methodism was forever overshadowed by the more numerous and wealthy Southern Episcopal Methodists. Throughout its entire history in Rockingham County the Methodist Protestant Church remained basically a rural denomination. Not until after 1900 did

that branch of Methodism establish a church in a Rockingham County town. Even despite its relatively small size the M.P. Church was able to develop programs within its fold comparable to those of its more numerous Methodist brethren. The acceptance of lay representation in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South after the Civil War made unification between these two branches a probability.

Development of the M.P. Church in Rockingham County following the Civil War was relatively small as only four lasting congregations were organized there between 1865-1900. All four churches were in southern Rockingham County - the principal area of development for the M.P. Church in the county. Since 1856 the churches in Rockingham County: namely, Fair Grove, Mizpah, and Palestine were in the Haw River Circuit of the North Carolina Annual Conference. This circuit also included northern Guilford County.

Midway Church was organized in October 1866 in the community a few miles west of Monroeton. According to local tradition the church was organized in a log school house and among them were members of the Carroll, Coe, Dabbs and McCollum families. Tradition also relates that Midway's first building was a log structure erected in 1867 and which was used until 1888 when a frame building was constructed during the pastorate of Rev. W. F. Kennett - a noted leader in the North Carolina Conference. It is likely, though not known for certain, that members of Fair Grove were instrumental in organizing Midway.

By 1901 Midway and Fair Grove constituted the two strongest M.P. churches in the Haw River Circuit. In 1928 the Midway congregation erected a fine sanctuary with gallery at the cost of \$7,500 - a considerable expense for a rural congregation. 24

A leader in the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church had roots in both the Midway and Fair Grove churches. Arminius Gray Dixon (1870-1962) was born in Rockingham County near the Flat Rock M.P. Church and was converted at a camp meeting at Fair Grove in August 1879. Accepting the call to the ministry, A. G. Dixon was ordained a minister in the M.P. Church in 1901 and served numerous pastorates in Piedmont North Carolina. He served as Executive Secretary for the Board of Young People's Work for the M.P. Church from 1917-1922, President of the North Carolina Conference from 1922-1927, and Superintendent of the Methodist Protestant Children's Home at High Point, N. C. from 1928-1941. During his term as North Carolina Conference President, the church established High Point College which, by 1939, had educated nearly half of the ministers in that Conference. Rev. Dixon's term at the Children's Home was especially noteworthy as the High Point Home was the denomination's only child-caring institution. The home was regarded as "the greatest success of North Carolina Methodist Protestants," and to which Dixon was largely responsible. 25

By 1872 Methodist Protestants southeast of Wentworth had established a preaching point in the Sandy Cross community. On September 25, 1876 trustees of the Sandy Cross Methodist Protestant Church purchased a two-acre lot for the church building and cemetery. The congregation at Sandy Cross was always small and following the founding of the Methodist Protestant Church in nearby Reidsville after the turn-of-the-century a number of Sandy Cross' members joined there. In early 1896 a new frame sanctuary was erected at Sandy Cross and was used for the next twenty years or so. The congregation was active as late as 1913 and as late as 1919 was considering making repairs to the 1896 building. Nevertheless, the congregation had apparently died out by 1920. ²⁶

There were two attempts to establish or reestablish preaching points in southwestern Rockingham County during the 1870s. In 1874 a lot was secured in Huntsville Township on the waters of Belews Creek by local Methodist Protestants. It is believed, on the basis of the fragmentary evidence available, that a church by the name of Oak Level was organized at this site. Nothing else is known about this church until 1894 when the trustees of the Flat Rock Methodist Protestant Circuit sold the church property to George Nelson, who in turn sold it to the Primitive Baptists in 1897. In the deed transactions the property is referred to as "Oak Level Church lot." Whatever the case, Oak Level Methodist Protestant Church had faded into oblivion by 1894. ²⁷ Meanwhile, local

Methodist Protestants connected with nearby Oak Grove Church south of Madison attempted to resurrect its dead congregation with the acquisition of a new site near its original 1854 location. These apparent efforts at revival came to naught and the new site was disposed of in 1883. In 1896 this site was chosen for the Ellisboro Baptist Church - still at this location in 1990.²⁸ Not until the 1890s would there be successful attempts to organize additional Methodist Protestant congregations in southwestern Rockingham County.

Until 1882 all Methodist Protestant churches in Rockingham County were in the southern half of the county and were on the Haw River Circuit which also included northern Guilford County and possibly a portion of northwestern Alamance County. Annual Conference in 1882 adopted a resolution of the Haw River Quarterly Conference which called for the division of the circuit. All churches east and southeast of Midway, and as far east as Altamahaw Factory in Alamance County would remain on the Haw River Circuit. Those churches west and southwest of Midway, and including Midway, were partitioned off into the new Flat Rock Circuit - named so for the growing church in extreme northern Guilford County near the Rockingham line. By 1899 the churches on the Haw River Circuit numbered seven: Bethany, Fair Grove, Mizpah, Sandy Cross, and Midway (added to the charge in 1891 from Flat Rock Circuit) in Rockingham County and Friendship and Brown Summit churches in Guilford County. The Flat Rock Circuit by 1899 was composed

of Palestine and Gideon Grove in Rockingham and Flat Rock, Bethel, Oak Ridge, Pine Grove, and Kernersville churches in Guilford County - a total of eight. Thus, Rockingham County was served by two separate circuits until the addition of the Reidsville Charge in 1912. ²⁹

During the mid 1890s the last of the rural Methodist Protestant congregations was organized in southwestern Rockingham County. Revival services in 1894 at Barham's Schoolhouse in the Bethany community led to the organization of the Bethany Church in September of that year. In 1895, during the pastorate of Rev. C.E.M. Raper, a frame one-room sanctuary was erected on a site on the Greensboro Road. ³⁰ In November 1896 Gideon Grove Church was organized a few miles north of Stokesdale and during the following year a frame church was erected. The second, and present, building was built in 1923. Among the leading families at Gideon Grove were the Pegrams, Lemonses and Angels. ³¹ The formation of Gideon Grove ended the rural church development within the Methodist Protestant Church in Rockingham County.

With the advent of the present century the Methodist Protestant Church would begin to widen its scope so as to include towns and cities as potential sites for new churches - but success there was only limited. The Methodist Protestants usually arrived upon the scene in a local town or city somewhat later than the Southern Methodists who came soon after the Civil War to the new industrial areas. Consequently, the

Southern Methodists were able to develop a growing and functioning church and, thus, "corner the market" so to speak. With only the church at Reidsville and the small congregation at Draper as the denomination's urban examples, the Methodist Protestants would remain essentially a rural church organization. Such was the case not only in Rockingham County, but in the rest of the state and region as well.

By the time of Methodist unification in 1939 the church in Rockingham County was an unusual mix of small rural congregations countered by large town churches. Those churches in the county with the largest memberships were in Reidsville, Leaksville, Madison, Spray and Draper - the county's main population centers. The leadership of Methodists in the area would come from congregations in these communities. By the advent of the First World War the town church, ruled by the upper class, had come of age in the county and the antebellum concept of the dominant rural church was gone forever.

CHAPTER VIII
LATE VICTORIAN METHODIST ARCHITECTURE
IN ROCKINGHAM COUNTY

The Civil War was the watershed period in Methodist architectural history. While the majority of the Methodist meetinghouses constructed prior to that time were relatively modest structures those erected thereafter reflected a more contemporary and elaborate mood. Of course, the need of repair and replacement of old churches neglected during the war was obvious indeed and the entry of the Methodist faith into the mainstream of American Protestantism led the denomination into all class levels in society. As the church brought in the wealthier classes of people a detectable change was seen within many congregations. Brick sanctuaries were replacing frame structures, stained glass was being used for the first time, pipe or reed organs would grace nearly every church building regardless of size, and the sanctuary interiors reflected the richer aspects of the late Victorian age. The following chapter notes the changes that occurred in Methodist church architecture in Rockingham County over a period of some five decades as local churches finally, and forever, cast the yoke of "Asbury Austerity" by the wayside.

This casting of the yoke occurred in two separate waves: the first one, during the 1870s through the 1890s, consisted of mainly the renovation and replacement of the older rural or village churches; and the second, lasting from the 1890s until the First World War focused largely upon the town churches as new sanctuaries were constructed. Together these two distinct movements influenced Methodist Church architecture for the next seventy-five years.

At the 1876 session of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South the Rev. VanBuren Albright Sharpe (1834-1894) was appointed to serve the Wentworth Circuit which still encompassed the eastern half of Rockingham County. There were eight churches on the charge: Wentworth, Bethlehem, Lowe's, Penile, Mt. Carmel, Ruffin, Pelham (just over the line in Caswell County), and Reidsville. Of these eight only Ruffin and Pelham, both organized in 1871, had new church buildings and Reidsville, organized in 1874, had not succeeded in launching a building project.¹ All of the other churches were housed in outdated buildings - some of which had been constructed during the 1830s. Not only were his churches in need of spiritual uplifting, Sharpe concluded, but their buildings were in dire need of repair or replacement. Beginning in 1877 Sharpe conducted a series of revivals throughout his circuit - the likes of which had not been witnessed in the county for years. In August 1877 the cornerstone for the Reidsville Church, the first brick Methodist church in the

county, was laid. This building, measuring forty feet by sixty feet and located on Scales Street, was dedicated in November 1878. Mount Carmel Church dedicated its new frame sanctuary in October 1879 which had been erected that year. In August 1880 the cornerstone for the new Lowe's Church was laid; the building was dedicated in October 1883. The 1835 Bethlehem Church was "extensively remodeled" at the cost of \$260.00 in late 1880, and plans were made to renovate the Wentworth Church the following year.² Every one of Sharpe's building programs on the Wentworth Circuit resulted in either new or refurbished buildings. The fruit of the labors of the pastor and his congregations was harvested in 1881 when the Wentworth Circuit was divided into two smaller circuits bringing more pastoral attention to each congregation.

The success of the Sharpe pastorate on the Wentworth Circuit, which lasted from 1876-1880, was never equaled again on a charge in Rockingham County. To accomplish so much building and renovation within four short years was no small feat. In 1892 both the Bethlehem and the recently reopened Salem churches constructed contemporary frame sanctuaries to replace the ones constructed nearly sixty years ago.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century the second wave of church building had begun. This time, however, the movement was largely centered in the towns and larger villages. It was not enough for the Methodist churches to rank among the leading congregations in the average Southern town -

the Methodists, in many cases, had to be the leader of local Protestantism. A fine modern church plant would be the symbol of that status desire. In no other town in Rockingham County was this feeling more deeply felt than in Reidsville. The Reidsville Church constructed a brick sanctuary on Scales Street during 1877-1878 to which was added a steeple and vestibule in 1884. During 1886-1889 the membership of the Reidsville Church alone had increased from 272 to 405 and it became quickly obvious that a larger building was necessary. Moreover, the Sunday School movement was well underway within the denomination and churches in the cities realized the necessity of adequate classroom space. Faced with a growing membership and a need for classrooms, the Reidsville Methodists elected in 1889 to build a new sanctuary. ³

In the fall of 1890 ground was broken for the new Reidsville Church on a lot on Main Street - directly behind the old sanctuary. Construction lagged on for three years, reaching completion in 1893 at the total cost of \$15,000 - \$5,000 more than the original estimated expense. The church was renamed "Main Street" for its new location and was dedicated in December 1895. The new edifice was clearly the county's finest church - wonderfully constructed in the Victorian Romanesque style with Gothic features. The Main Street Methodist Church in Danville, Virginia served as the prototype for the Reidsville church. The sanctuary possessed three towers with the largest of these housing a bell.

Italian stained glass windows graced the sanctuary. An additional \$15,000 was spent in 1913-14 when a two-story classroom building was added. Today, Main Street Church continues to be the finest Methodist edifice in Rockingham County - an elegant example of Victorian church architecture. ⁴

With the arrival of the twentieth century, other new churches were being erected in towns throughout Rockingham County. In 1901 the Spray Methodists began construction on a frame sanctuary on a prominent hill overlooking the mill complex and village. ⁵ Two years later the Leaksville Church replaced their forty-year old meetinghouse with a new structure. In 1906 the Ruffin congregation erected a sanctuary to replace the "barn-like" building constructed in 1872. Madison and Draper closed out the period of building with new sanctuaries in 1909 and 1914 respectively - the former church being a brick structure costing approximately \$5,000.

The Leaksville Church, organized about 1840, is an interesting example of the church architectural evolution. The members at Leaksville were originally a small group and it was not until 1859-1860 that they could build their first church - a two-story edifice, the second floor of which was used by the local Masonic lodge. ⁶ The church building was a plain "box-like" structure with a small bell tower on top, and soon became inadequate for a growing congregation. During the summer of 1903 construction began on a new frame sanctuary modeled on the "church extension" plan consisting

of studding with weatherboarding on the outside and lathes for the plaster walls on the inside. The 1903 church was located at the corner of Henry and Jay streets - next door to the former building. Not only did the 1903 building contain a sanctuary, but also four classrooms and a pastor's study. Circular pews, chandeliers, sloping aisles to the chancel, beautiful stained glass windows, a corner bell tower and a tree-lined entrance added grace and harmony to the physical plant. Construction on the \$6,000 building was completed in 1904 and dedication services were held the following year.⁷ An educational annex was added to this building in 1936-37 followed by the construction of a new modern brick sanctuary in 1954-55. Within approximately a century the Leaksville Methodists had shifted one hundred-and-eighty degrees from adherence to the Asbury architectural austerity to post-Victorian and later Colonial Revival elegance.

Within a period of approximately a quarter century, 1900-1925, black congregations in practically all of the county's towns and villages erected new sanctuaries. In 1901 the St. Paul Church in Reidsville approved the purchase of a new location at the northwest corner of Williams and Scales streets.⁸ A frame sanctuary was erected during 1904-1905 and the cornerstone was laid in July 1906, marking the completion of the building. The local newspaper hailed the completion of the church as a symbol of the "liberality and race pride" of the black community.⁹ This building was

brick veneered just prior to its destruction by fire in December 1919. With the aid of local citizens, both black and white, a new St. Paul Church was constructed on the same site. This beautiful Gothic Revival edifice was consecrated in 1921 during the pastorate of the Rev. Grandison M. Phelps.¹⁰ The Methodists at St. John's in Leaksville had planned as early as 1896 to relocate more in the heart of the town and an acre on Patrick Street was thus acquired. The close proximity of the proposed new location to the white Leaksville Methodist Episcopal Church, South on Jay Street and the homes of prominent white citizens prompted local opposition to the move and forced the congregation to purchase another site on Henry Street - a much less conspicuous location.¹¹ The cornerstone for this frame building was laid in July 1906. Tradition relates that timber for this new church was floated down the Dan River from Madison and the members stood on the river bank until late hours pulling the lumber onto dry land.¹² The success of building projects at Reidsville and Leaksville prompted other churches to follow suit.

In Wentworth and Madison the local congregations also initiated building projects during the 1900-1925 period. One of the earliest church records of a black Methodist congregation in Rockingham County is the minutes of the St. Paul (Wentworth) Church Building Committee. In October 1909 construction began on a new frame building to replace the one constructed during the 1870s. T. J. Harper served as chairman

and treasurer of the building committee and S. E. Harper served as secretary. ¹³ At the 1910 session of the North Carolina Conference, which convened at Leaksville, it was reported that the church at Wentworth was "now erected and is going on to completion." ¹⁴ This sanctuary, which stood until recent years, was used by the St. Paul congregation until the 1950s. In Madison, the Saint Stephen's congregation purchased a new site in 1923 on what is now U. S. Highway (Business) 220 in the black community sandwiched between the adjoining towns of Madison and Mayodan. In 1924 a brick sanctuary, similar in design to the white Methodist Church in Madison, was constructed during the pastorate of Rev. William B. Scales. The North Carolina Annual Conference convened at Madison in October 1926 in the completed building. This church burned in November 1959 and was replaced by the present brick edifice. The completion of the St. Stephen's Church in the 1920s ended the spurt of growth and expansion of the black urban churches in the county. ¹⁵

In summation, with the entry and acceptance of Methodism within the mainstream of American Protestantism the simplicity of Methodist architecture was replaced by the acceptance of the status quo. Methodists had fallen prey to the more humanistic embellishments that dominated the late Victorian era in American history. The wealthy, whom Asbury cautioned his congregations against, had become indispensable to the overall growth and survival of the church. True, the rural

churches continued to exist in modest frame buildings, but the congregations who worshiped there no longer dominated or molded church policy. The Methodist meetinghouse was now an unwanted anachronism - never to rise again. In essence, the evolution in Methodist architecture coincided with and was largely due to the church's acceptance of and dominance by the upper class in American society.

CHAPTER IX

METHODISM "UNIFIED" AND EPILOGUE

Since the early 1900s there had been numerous attempts at unification among the three branches of American Methodism. Sentiment for unification in North Carolina was strong with the Methodist Protestants among the most vociferous proponents. Time and experience had shown Methodists that there were far more similarities among them than there were differences between them. Moreover, the potential for greater and more far-reaching service was recognized with the pooling of financial and human resources. Also, the two branches of Episcopal Methodism had accepted the principle of lay representation that was a touchstone of the Methodist Protestant Church. The Methodist Protestants had meanwhile realized that a tighter administrative control was needed as the denomination developed ministries outside of the church sanctuary. There existed little, if any, major doctrinal disagreements among the three branches. The demise of slavery and the birth of the "New South" made those issues which divided the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844 basically unimportant or at least more so than previously. Harsh sectional feelings between the North and South had healed considerably. In addition, a new generation of Methodists had risen in the early twentieth century who had not participated in the early controversies that had so bitterly divided Methodism in 1828 and 1844. These leaders

looked instead toward a seemingly bright future once unification was achieved. ¹

The Methodist Protestant Church had long been in favor of proposed unions with other branches of Methodism. With the adoption of lay representation within the Methodist Episcopal Church, South following the Civil War one of the great obstacles to eventual unification was eliminated. There remained, however, the issue of the episcopacy and the refusal of Methodist Protestants to accept that form of church administration. Yet, during the late 1800s and early 1900s such adverse feelings regarding the episcopal system had tempered as the church expanded its role into numerous aspects of society from mission work to charitable institutions. The church was in need of a more complex system of authority. By the First World War leaders in the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church were openly expressing hopes for an eventual unification of Methodism. Clearly, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South had nothing to lose and everything to gain by a union - there were no sacrifices to be made by them. The Methodist Protestants, on the other hand, would have to accept the episcopacy, but their strong feelings against this concept had moderated.

Fraternal greetings had been exchanged between the North Carolina Conference of the M. P. Church and the two Southern Methodist conferences in the state on numerous occasions. In 1923 a committee of representatives from these three

conferences in the state was formed to consider ways and means of possible unification. At the 1930 session of the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church the members considered requesting dismissal from the General Conference and to unite with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The issue was tabled and referred to the General Conference - consequently killing it. The concept of an even larger Methodist union was quickly developing thereby making limited unions, such as that proposed in North Carolina, unnecessary. The history of the Methodist Protestant Church was quickly drawing to a peaceful close.² The 1939 Historian of the North Carolina M. P. Conference commented fifty years later that "the Methodist Protestant Church had basically served its purpose and accomplished its goals."³ The demise of the Methodist Protestant Church in 1939 was indeed a noble one in that many of the democratic ideals incorporated into the new Methodist Church in 1939 could be traced back to those dissenters in the 1820s who had separated from the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Yet, there were other issues to be settled before unification could become a reality. Among the most important issues was the position of blacks within this unified church. Many Southerners viewed unification as a means of the blacks attaining racial equality which they opposed. As a form of compromise the blacks would be included within the new Methodist Church, but their annual conferences would continue

to be racially segregated. A new administrative level would be interposed between the General and annual conferences. Five jurisdictional conferences were created according to geographical regions in the nation. North Carolina fell into the Southeastern Jurisdiction Conference along with Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi and Cuba. However, the blacks were not included in this geographical plan of jurisdictional conferences, but their annual conferences throughout the nation were placed into a jurisdictional conference all their own.⁴ In this manner, the blacks were technically under the umbrella of the new Methodist Church but they were still subservient to the dominant and wealthier whites. Clearly, it was a case where the blacks were "separate and still unequal." The General Conference would be the only forum in which the blacks could appear as equals to the white Methodists - though heavily outnumbered. The day of racial "equality" within American Methodism was three decades into the future.

By 1938 all three General Conferences in American Methodism had approved of the Plan of Union and the uniting conference was held at Kansas City, Missouri from April 26-May 10, 1939. At this 1939 conference the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the Methodist Protestant Church in the United States were merged into the Methodist Church. The various annual

conferences within the three former branches of Methodism were then allowed to hold uniting sessions of their own.⁵ In North Carolina it was deemed advisable to retain the geographical divisions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In so doing all white Methodist congregations would remain either in the Western North Carolina Conference or the (Eastern) North Carolina Conference whose boundaries while in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South remained basically intact within the new Methodist Church.⁶ All of Rockingham County fell into the Greensboro District of the Western North Carolina Conference of Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference of the Methodist Church. The uniting session of the three branches that fell into the Western North Carolina Conference was held in Greensboro at West Market Street Church on October 20, 1939.⁷ After a century of division American Methodism was united once again and in a very similar form as well.

The unification had relatively little effect on the churches in Rockingham County. The new Methodist Church in North Carolina was dominated by former members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In Rockingham County the Methodist Protestants were outnumbered by Southern Methodists five-to-one. The circuits in Rockingham County were not immediately realigned with unification. In fact, things continued much as they had been before in the local churches. The auxiliary ministries continued much as before under new names and expanded resources. The blacks continued to exist

as a quasi-segregated denomination within the Methodist mainstream which, white Methodists contended, was to the mutual satisfaction of both races. The unification brought approximately 5,500 Methodists together in Rockingham County alone and without significant opposition or bitter feelings. Of the approximately 5,000 white Methodists in Rockingham County roughly three-fifths were members of "town" churches. The status quo of the dominant wealthy church members in the towns was to continue on into the new Methodist Church; the largest churches in the county would continue to influence policy-making decisions for the foreseeable future. In some respects the Methodist Episcopal Church, South continued to exist in Rockingham County long after its abolition in 1939. Unification for Methodism in America and certainly in Rockingham County also meant continuity as well.

In this study of the somewhat elusive history of Methodism in Rockingham County one great pattern is detectable and that is the development of local Methodism from a primitive and austere faith to one of great influence and wealth enhanced by the shift from a rural to urban power base. Methodism began as a means of reform with the established church, but it soon became much more than that to those adherents in America. Through the efforts of Asbury an independent church was established in America and these efforts indeed bore fruit in Rockingham County as early as the 1780s. The healthy and perhaps more fertile Piedmont region of

North Carolina attracted poor and persecuted Methodists from regions further north and local Methodism was given new impetus by these arrivals. Methodism flourished in the more thickly settled eastern half of Rockingham County and it was there that the strongest congregations existed. The so-called "Jeffersonian Democratic" element in the county no doubt influenced local church politics so much so that the Methodist Protestant Church was able to establish congregations along the Haw River valley. The democratic element within the Methodist Protestant Church was a determinant in the denomination remaining essentially a rural one in nature. The Civil War brought about a great change within the white Episcopal Methodist ranks in Rockingham County. The financial and spiritual foundations of all churches were badly shaken if not destroyed along with the conquered Confederacy. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South in the area was only a rural-dominated faith with several hundred members. A day of revival was sorely needed.

The seventy years prior to Methodist unification in 1939 delivered the zeal and prosperity to the churches that had never existed before the Civil War. The arrival of the railroad and new industry to the county's towns and villages opened new territories for churches and greatly strengthened existing congregations. The rise of the protracted meeting as a latter-day successor to the famed camp meetings not only revived the rural church but expanded the societal role of

the urban church. The expansion of the auxiliary ministries within the local congregations permitted the church a greater role in the lives of its members and the community-at-large. With expanded programs the churches also discarded the "Asbury Austerity" regarding church architecture and constructed as fine and opulently Victorian sanctuaries as their resources would allow. The Methodists were indeed forced to depend upon the wealthy and powerful of whom Asbury had warned his flocks. In 1939 the value of the property owned by the urban congregations in the county was in the neighborhood of \$145,000 - three times the combined total of rural church property in the county. The decline of the rural areas following the industrialization of the towns and cities also meant a like decline in the congregations in those areas. Yet, there were elements of hope as well. The blacks were able to finally establish their own congregations - controlled and governed by members of their own race - though the day of racial equality within the denomination was many years into the future. By the time of Methodist unification in 1939 the church had finally come of age in America - it was a nationwide denomination once again.

Despite the persistent problems of race relations, rural church decline and neglect and the acceptance of the "worldliness of the wealthy" Methodism in the American South, and in Rockingham County, North Carolina had embarked upon a path of development and growth deeply tied, though unconsciously so,

to the toils and cares of those pioneer followers of Wesley and Asbury who brought the fires of revivalism to the red-clay Piedmont region of North Carolina some two centuries ago.

Notes

Chapter I

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23 Rockingham County Deed Books 154, p. 424; 168, p. 181.
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25 Rockingham County Deed Book 3D, p. 526.

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28 Perdue, "Madison Church" 32-34.

29 Dan Valley Echo, 15 April 1886.

30 Cornerstone is preserved at the present St. John's
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31 Rockingham County Deed Book 130, p. 301.

32 Carroll, History of North Carolina Conference 29.

33 Rockingham County Deed Book 125, p. 401.

34 Rockingham County Deed Book 176, p. 85.

35 "Historical Sketches of the First United Methodist
Church, Reidsville, N.C." (unpublished typescript). In
1939 Reidsville Church was renamed Lindsey Street Church and
after relocation on the city's south side during the 1950s
it was renamed First Church.

36 Rockingham County Deed Book 205, p. 250.

37 Rockingham County Deed Books 361, p. 40; 360, p. 125.
What had been the Draper M.P. Church in 1939 was renamed

Fairway Church and by the following year the congregation was known as Wayside. The congregation basically disbanded about 1942-43 and the remnants thereof emerged as a Pilgrim Holiness Church.

38 Ownby 137, 143, 163.

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43 Ownby 129, 143.

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51 Frances R. Brown, personal interview, May 1986.
Miss Brown attended the Salem Church as a child during the early 1900s.

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The North Carolina Historical Review xi (July 1934) 66-67.
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- 12 "Eden-Mount Tabor United Methodist Charge," Greensboro News & Record, 1 September 1990, A10.
- 13 Rockingham County Deed Book 3E, p. 213.
- 14 Madison Messenger, 17 October 1935.
- 15 Reidsville News, 27 November 1875; Rockingham County Deed Book 3W, p. 353; Raleigh Christian Advocate 18 November 1885.
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Appendix I

METHODIST CONGREGATIONS IN ROCKINGHAM COUNTY 1939

Note: The following is a listing of the churches in Rockingham County that were involved in the unification of the three branches of American Methodism in 1939. The churches are listed in alphabetical order, followed by the branch of Methodism to which the individual churches belong and the date each congregation was organized. The dates in which the "circa" designation ("c.") is used indicate the earliest reference to the existence of that congregation in cases where the actual date of founding is not definitely known. It must also be reiterated that Methodist Episcopal Church, South congregations predating 1844-1845 were originally Methodist Episcopal. Those congregations noted as "Methodist Episcopal" below are black congregations founded after the Civil War. "M.E.S." signifies congregations of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; "M.P." represents the Methodist Protestant Church, and "M.E." for the Methodist Episcopal Church (black).

CHURCH	BRANCH OF METHODISM	DATE ORGANIZED
Bethany	M.P.	1894
Bethlehem	M.E.S.	1835
Centenary	M.E.S.	1899 ¹
Chapel Hill	M.E.	c. 1898 ²
Dan Valley*	M.E.S.	1921
Draper	M.E.S.	1907 ³
Draper*	M.P.	1921

CHURCH	BRANCH OF METHODISM	DATE ORGANIZED
Eden	M.E.S.	1874
Fair Grove	M.P.	1832
Garrett's Grove	M.E.	1896
Gideon Grove	M.P.	1896
Glencoe	M.E.S.	1902
Hayes Chapel	M.E.	c. 1890
Hickory Grove	M.E.S.	1892
Leaksville	M.E.S.	c. 1840
Lowe's	M.E.S.	1796
<i>Mission</i> Main Street (Reidsville)	M.E.S.	1874
Matthews Chapel	M.E.S.	1938
Mayodan	M.E.S.	1901
Midway	M.P.	1866
Mizpah	M.P.	1850
Mount Carmel	M.E.S.	1808
Mount Hermon	M.E.S.	1858 ⁴
Mount Tabor	M.E.S.	1887
Mount Zion	M.E.S.	c. 1874
Oak Grove	M.E.	1900
Palestine	M.P.	c. 1856
Price	M.E.S.	1860 ⁵
Reidsville	M.P.	1911 ⁶
Ruffin	M.E.S.	1871
Saint John's	M.E.	c. 1889
Saint Paul's (Reidsville)	M.E.	1873

CHURCH	BRANCH OF METHODISM	DATE ORGANIZED
Saint Paul's (Wentworth)*	M.E.	1878
Saint Stephen's	M.E.	1890
Salem	M.E.S.	1799
Spray	M.E.S.	1901
Stoneville	M.E.S.	1885 ⁷
Wentworth	M.E.S.	1836
Wesley Chapel	M.E.	c. 1882

*Congregations now extinct

¹Centenary Church was originally the Mulberry Island Church, organized in 1899 as the successor to the Wesley Chapel (white) congregation organized in 1825. The name "Centenary" dates from 1919.

²Chapel Hill Church appears to have had regular preaching services as early as the 1880s. The church's first deed is dated 1898.

³Draper Church was later renamed First Church.

⁴Mount Hermon Church, organized originally in Stokes County, relocated in Rockingham County about 1909.

⁵Price Church was originally Grogansville Church, organized in 1860. The church moved to the Price community in 1887 and the name was thus changed.

⁶Reidsville Church was renamed Lindsey Street Church in 1939, and First Church during the 1950s.

⁷Stoneville Church was renamed Hodgin Memorial in 1951.

Appendix II

LEADING SOUTHERN METHODIST FAMILIES IN ROCKINGHAM COUNTY
DURING THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

Leadership in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in Rockingham County during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries changed patterns from its antebellum status. While those families who possessed roles in church leadership before the war maintained their positions afterwards, their overall influence had somewhat diminished. Many of these families had died out or moved away over the years. We shall briefly look at four prominent families in local Methodism: the Reid family of Wentworth, the Field family in Leaksville, the Meador family of Salem Church, and the Strader family of the Mt. Carmel Church - the latter two families being the only influential one within the church today.

With the untimely death of the Rev. Dr. Numa F. Reid at his home in Wentworth in June 1873 the Methodist forces in Rockingham County and the state had lost a most important leader. Picking up the mantle of Dr. Reid were his sons: James Wesley Reid (1849-1902) and Frank Lewis Reid (1851-1894). James W. Reid, the eldest son, pursued an active career in teaching before developing a sound law practice in Wentworth in the 1870s. He married into the Ellington family - another prominent local Methodist family. James W. Reid embarked upon the local and state lecture circuit where he was known as the "silver tongued orator." The leader of the laity in the Wentworth Church, James W. Reid served in nearly every

important church office on the local and district levels and was a popular speaker at church functions. He was also a great supporter of the Sunday School movement. His devotion to public service led to his appointment to the United States House of Representatives in 1884. Financial ruin and his subsequent resignation from the House led Reid to move to Idaho where he rebuilt his fortune and career.

Frank Lewis Reid followed in his father's footsteps into the Methodist itinerancy. His first pastoral appointment was to the Madison Circuit (1870-73) which included the western half of Rockingham and the extreme eastern part of Stokes counties. Frank Reid also married into a locally prominent Methodist family and began a ministerial career full of promise when illness prompted him to retire from the itinerancy. Instead of active preaching he turned to the field of education as president of both Greensboro and Louisburg colleges. He also assumed editorship of the Raleigh Christian Advocate, the official organ of the North Carolina Annual Conference. The death of Rev. Reid in 1894 left only his half brother, Numa R. Reid (1873-1946) of Wentworth, to participate in local church affairs. The demise of the Reid family, the most prominent leaders in Rockingham County Methodism, was a great loss to the churches, but the influence of these individuals remains strong in many of the area's active congregations.

In Leaksville, too, the leading Methodist family was also on the wane. The Methodists in that town owed their survival to both the Rev. Benton Field (1797-1871) and his son Rev. Daniel Early Field (1831-1916) - local Methodist pastors. As Rev. Benton Field reorganized the Methodist society meeting at Leaksville in the 1840s and under his guiding hand transformed the group into a thriving congregation his son maintained and expounded upon his father's dedication to the congregation. Daniel Field organized the first Sunday School at Leaksville in the early 1860s and served as its superintendent until his retirement in 1911. As a local pastor, he often filled in for an ill minister and conducted countless marriages and funerals. He was without doubt not only the sage and spiritual leader for the Methodists in Leaksville, but for the entire community as well and his passing in 1916 ended an interesting chapter in the story of Rockingham County Methodism.

Another interesting example of a prominent Methodist family on the local level in Rockingham County was that of John Meador (1768-1844) and his wife Nancy Flippen (1779-after 1830) who migrated from Prince Edward County, Virginia in 1821. They apparently were unrelated to those Methodists who came from the same area a few years before and settled in the Bethlehem-Mount Carmel communities. The Meadors settled on the upper branches of Wolf Island Creek within the present-day city limits of Reidsville. The family joined the Salem Church

which was near their home and descendants of John and Nancy Meador and their eight children continue their connections with that congregation through membership and an annual reunion in June. Children and later descendants of John and Nancy Meador were later involved with the Bethlehem, Leaksville, Lowe's and Reidsville (Southern Methodist) churches. Among the descendants have been ministers, physicians, educators and church officials on various levels. Few other families have had such widespread service to churches on the local level in Rockingham County.

The Mount Carmel Church produced an interesting number of leaders in Methodism on the local level and beyond. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries two local pastors guided not only Mt. Carmel, but assisted in work at other congregations in the county: Revs. John H. Anderson (1826-1901) and John T. Strader (1852-1943). The Bethlehem and Hickory Grove churches and societies meeting at Shady Grove, near Wentworth, and at Sadler School benefited greatly from the influence of these astute churchmen. Two grandsons of Rev. Strader: Rev. Lindsey F. Strader (1900-) and Rev. Silas G. Strader (1895-1990) were raised in the Mt. Carmel Church and entered the Methodist ministry - the latter as a local pastor. The daughter of the Rev. Silas Strader, Evelyn, entered the mission field in India in 1949 - though as a member of the Draper Church. Another member of the Carmel Church, Ollie Lee Smith, became a missionary to Korea

in 1925 and served in the field there for twelve years.

Mt. Carmel continues to be one of the most prolific congregations in Rockingham County and is a leader among ~~the~~ rural congregations.