

**METHODISM**  
**ALIVE IN** ★  
★ **NORTH** ★  
★ **CAROLINA** ★

A Volume Commemorating  
The Bicentennial  
Of The Carolina Circuit

Edited by  
O. KELLY INGRAM

•

*The Divinity School of Duke University  
Durham, North Carolina  
The North Carolina Conference and the  
Western North Carolina Conference  
The United Methodist Church*

---

---

## CHAPTER ONE

---

---

# The British Background of North Carolina Methodism

FRANK BAKER

In 1735 John Wesley came out to Georgia as a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts—the “S.P.G.” Georgia was a mere infant in age, but the older North Carolina was only a little more advanced. Although discovered in 1524 and briefly settled by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1585, efforts to colonize the area were dogged with difficulty even after Charles II had granted it by charter to Lords Proprietors in 1663. Even when the colony was transferred to the Crown in 1729 the entire population was less than forty thousand, and was almost confined to the tidewater area.<sup>1</sup> Here there had been an attempt to reproduce the modest culture of an English country town in the three boroughs which numbered over sixty families—Bath, New Bern, and Edenton, to which in 1735 was added Wilmington, and in 1745 its slightly older neighbour across the Cape Fear River, Brunswick.<sup>2</sup> Most of the population, however, was scattered in much smaller communities—using this term to include a dozen log cabins dotted along a few miles of creek—or lived a day’s journey from their nearest neighbour. All were nominally members of the Church of England, even though a few declared themselves dissenters. The clergy were for the most part much like Wesley himself at this time,

---

Chapter One, THE BRITISH BACKGROUND OF NORTH CAROLINA METHODISM was written by Frank Baker, Ph.D., Professor of English Church History, Divinity School, Duke University, and Editor-in-Chief of The Oxford Edition of Wesley’s Works.

Footnotes for this Chapter begin on Page 141.

younger men with a genuine concern for their scattered parishioners, among whom they made extended pastoral tours, holding services at preaching points which ranged from the rare brick parish church, through wooden chapels of ease, to the log cabins of friendly planters. Actually in 1729 the Rev. James Blair reported that there was not a single clergyman in North Carolina,<sup>3</sup> and sixteen years later there were only two, James Moir in the south and Clement Hall in the north, who from their bases in Wilmington and Edenton served the whole east coast.<sup>4</sup> In 1741 the colony was divided into sixteen parishes, which were roughly co-extensive with large counties, most of which were later subdivided.<sup>5</sup> Churches had been built only in Bath and Edenton, though there seem to have been a handful of wooden chapels belonging to the Church of England. Clergy remained few in number, and there were still only four officiating in 1741.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of a tradition that Wesley preached in one of the colonial chapels in North Carolina,<sup>7</sup> he never set foot in the colony, though he knew Charleston, South Carolina, fairly well. Sailing out on the *Simmonds* with him in 1735 had been the son of Robert Johnson, the Governor of South Carolina,<sup>8</sup> and as a missionary he soon became aware of the encroachments into Georgia of unlicensed traders from both South and North Carolina.<sup>9</sup> On July 26, 1736, while traveling to Charleston with his brother Charles, who was returning to England, he spent some hours reading an "account of Carolina."<sup>10</sup> Charles' report to the Georgia Trustees claimed that Georgia was suffering greatly from the unneighbourly conduct of the inhabitants of the two Carolinas, going so far as to charge them with trying to seduce settlers away from Savannah, with persuading the Indians to abrogate their agreements with Oglethorpe, and even with inciting the Spanish at Fort Augustine to attack them.<sup>11</sup> It was also to Charleston that John Wesley came in order to print his *Collection of Psalms and Hymns* (1737), apparently the first hymnbook (as opposed to a collection of psalms only) to be published on the American continent.<sup>12</sup>

John Wesley's pupil, friend, and colleague, George Whitefield, one of the last to join the group of Oxford Methodists, and the one who kept the term "Methodist" alive in America for a generation, came to know North Carolina fairly well. It is clear, however, that he was not enamoured of the province. The swampy coastal plain, with its shallow, shifting sounds, was a hazard to be endured by venturesome travelers between Virginia and South Carolina rather than a paradise for settlers. The week's journey

along three hundred miles of unmarked, unpaved road necessitated several voyages by irregular ferries, a succession of guided expeditions through almost impenetrable forests, the traversing of swamps and the crossing of bridges which were constantly being swept away by storms and floods. Whitefield traveled that arduous and treacherous north-south road on at least six occasions.

The first was in December, 1739. At "Eden Town, a little place, beautifully situated by the waterside," he was well entertained at a public house, but did not preach. At Bath, reached by the worst roads he had ever met, through wet, swampy, and uninhabited territory, the Rev. John Garzia welcomed him to preach in St. Thomas' Church on Sunday, December 23, to nearly a hundred people—five times the normal congregation. In the courthouse at New Bern on Christmas Day he attended worship and sacrament, bemoaning its perfunctory nature, and in the afternoon himself "read prayers and preached" to an attentive congregation, of whom "most were melted into tears." On Sunday, December 30, he "read prayers and preached, both morning and evening, in the courthouse" at "New Town on Cape Fear River," i.e., Brunswick, the port founded in 1727, which he spoke of as "a little but thriving place for trade." There were many Scots in his congregation.<sup>13</sup>

During Whitefield's third tour in America he again seems to have passed through North Carolina, in the winter of 1746 and the spring of 1747, though at least one of his unrecorded journeys between the north and Charleston may have been by sea. In the autumn of 1747, however, he made a deliberate effort to spend the better part of a month "hunting after sinners in North Carolina woods"—"this unevangelized wilderness," as several times he described it. In fact he gave up after spending less than two weeks here, writing from Wilmington on October 18, "I could write much, but am fatigued, having preached several times, and rode on horseback through the woods an hundred and sixty miles." His added comment, "Jesus makes the barren wilderness to smile," hardly compensates for the lack of his usual ebullience in the flat statement that he had preached "several times."<sup>14</sup>

Whitefield's fourth visit, in 1751-2, was spent mainly in Georgia and South Carolina. During his fifth, 1754-55, he seems to have passed speedily through North Carolina once. His sixth visit, 1763-5, brought him to North Carolina in November, 1764, when he "met with what they call 'New Lights' almost every stage," and interviewed "a wealthy planter" who was one of their leaders, as well as securing the names of a handful of their preachers.<sup>15</sup> On

this occasion he himself met with such a cordial reception that he decided to come back early in the spring. Accordingly he made another tour in March and April, 1765, yielding to importunities from the mayor of Wilmington and others to stay there a day or so longer in order to preach on Sunday, March 31. Governor William Tryon was present, and reported that Whitefield's sermon would have done credit in St. James', London.<sup>16</sup> He also preached at New Bern for the Rev. James Reed, who reported that "several that had been tinctured with the principles of Methodism came a great many miles to hear him," but were mortified to hear him castigate religious emotionalism not accompanied by holy living.<sup>17</sup> (Reed had been complaining since 1760 about the "Methodists" on the fringes of his parish, and found it difficult to accept Whitefield's assertion that these censorious antinomians had no right to the title, which belonged properly only to the followers of the Wesleys and himself; Reed insisted that at least these New England sectarians had sprung from the seed planted by Whitefield.)<sup>18</sup> This proved, in fact, to be Whitefield's last visit. He had founded no societies, he had not strayed from the normal north-south route, he had preached mainly in Anglican churches, he had not, apparently, been the means of any remarkable revival in North Carolina. Yet the magnetism of his name and the eloquence of his preaching, even when he was becoming stout and asthmatical, helped to keep alive a spiritual expectancy, a yearning for something more than a formal religion. He had indeed sown some seed even in North Carolina, seed from which abundant harvests were to be gathered by settlers of various denominations and of none, but especially by those other "Methodists" who owed their earthly spiritual allegiance to his older colleagues John and Charles Wesley.

When Whitefield first passed through North Carolina in 1739 its population numbered about forty thousand. By the time of his last visit in 1765 this had grown to about a hundred and twenty thousand, most of whom lived on the coastal plain, while the political leadership was firmly in the hands of the coastal elite. The Piedmont was rapidly increasing in importance, however, and the pre-revolutionary decade witnessed a mass influx which tripled the population.<sup>19</sup> A few inland communities were franchised as boroughs, thus being empowered to send their own representatives to the colonial Assembly: Halifax (1764), Salisbury (1765-6), Hillsborough (1773; originally incorporated in 1759 as Childsbury), and Fayetteville (1773; originally incorporated in 1762 as Campbellton).<sup>20</sup> Thousands of the new immigrants were Scots Presbyterians,

but there is no question that thousands also were from England or Ireland, and came with Methodist connections, or were at least amenable to the Methodist approach. There is no clear evidence of any organized Methodist society, however, before 1773, although during the preceding decade the settlers in general warmly welcomed the diversions afforded by the visits of Whitefield and of other less reputable itinerant preachers.

George Whitefield set sail for the last of his seven voyages to America in August, 1769. In the same month the first two of Wesley's itinerant preachers to be stationed in America also left England. (They were, of course, laymen, not ordained ministers like Whitefield.) These men, Joseph Pilmore<sup>21</sup> and Richard Boardman, spent the better part of two years alternating between Philadelphia and New York. Even after the arrival of reinforcements in the persons of Francis Asbury and Richard Wright, in October, 1771, they did not go much farther afield, as they had intended.<sup>22</sup> Not until May, 1772, did Pilmore set off, and even then with a measure of reluctance,<sup>23</sup> on a missionary tour of the south which lasted eleven months. Nearly seven months was spent in Virginia, mostly around Norfolk, where he founded and stabilized two healthy Methodist societies. After three of those months he paid an exploratory midweek visit to the north-east corner of North Carolina, preaching the first "official" Methodist sermon at Currituck courthouse on Tuesday, September 29, 1772, and after a few days returned to Virginia for a further two months. Then he ventured on an expedition down the east coast as far as Savannah and back, lasting almost four months, of which a total of over six weeks was spent in coming and going through North Carolina. For his journey he was armed with some letters of recommendation to hospitable people, but frequently he put up at inns, usually free of charge because he was a preacher. He found traveling in his horsedrawn carriage very difficult, and at times extremely dangerous. Even more distressing to him was the state of religion in the province, especially that of the Church of England, to which as a good English Methodist he naturally gravitated. In his Journal he recorded: "It is two hundred miles wide, and is settled near four hundred miles in length from the sea, and the Church established as in England; yet in all this country there are but eleven ministers!"<sup>24</sup> At Edenton he visited St. Paul's Church, describing it as "a poor, damp, dirty place, where they have only preaching once in three weeks." At Bath he "was glad to find a pretty little church, but this parish, like many others, has no minister!" He continued,

"I have passed through four counties, and am now in the fifth, and not one church minister in them all!"<sup>25</sup>

At last Pilmore came to New Bern, at this time the provincial capital. Here the picture changed. He attended the parish church on Christmas Day, and "heard a sensible and useful sermon." Not only so, but when he himself preached at the courthouse he had "the genteelst congregation" he had seen since leaving Philadelphia. He was invited to many homes, and "had the honour of dining with Mr. [Isaac] Edwards, Secretary to the Governor, where [he] was treated with the highest respect." He remained for five days, preaching on Sunday afternoon and every other evening in the courthouse to "genteel" crowds—the somewhat snobbish adjective keeps cropping up in his narrative. So carried away with emotion was he that when "a great multitude attended to hear [his] last sermon (for the present)" he "enlarged more than usual," adding a rapturous note in his Journal: "In all my travels through the world I have met with none like the people of Newburn! Instead of going to balls and assemblies as people of fashion in general do, especially at this season of the year, they came driving in their coaches to hear the word of the Lord, and wait upon God in his ordinances!"<sup>26</sup>

This was one bright exception, however, and did not cause Pilmore to alter his general opinion about the spiritual poverty of North Carolina. The sharp contrast at Beesley's Chapel in Onslow county perhaps added fire to his reactions: "While I was preaching I observed several of the people go to a pail of water that stood near the door of the chapel to drink, which greatly disturbed the congregation, for which I gave them a public reproof, and called them to drink of the water of life."<sup>27</sup>

In North Carolina as elsewhere Pilmore preached at every opportunity, in a sincere attempt to foster the kind of spiritual rebirth which had already been experienced in England and in other parts of America. His general plan of operation was to gain permission (apparently with little difficulty) to use the courthouse in the small county towns scattered about the country, and to send a town crier or some co-operative citizen to invite all the inhabitants to his meetings. This he did in Currituck, Edenton, New Bern, and Wilmington.<sup>28</sup> If the local Anglican clergyman was at home, he sought his co-operation, though it seemed unlikely that even in the colonies the hospitality of a church pulpit would be offered to a lay itinerant preacher, however well-intentioned. In England the chapels of ease would similarly have been closed to him, but here

Pilmore seems to have preached in several, which furnishes a clue both to the lack of ordained clergy and to the spiritual hunger and independent spirit of the settlers. Positive identification of these preaching-places is often impossible; most have completely disappeared. It appears likely, however, that Pilmore preached in Anglican chapels at Coinjock and at Tulls Creek in Currituck county,<sup>29</sup> at the Narrows Chapel, probably also in Currituck, but possibly in Pasquotank,<sup>30</sup> at one near Hertford in Perquimans county,<sup>31</sup> and at Beesley's Chapel in Onslow county.<sup>32</sup> He even preached in St. Philip's Church in Brunswick, which at the time was without a minister, though there was one at St. James's, Wilmington.<sup>33</sup> And when at last he was homeward bound, in the ferry-boat tacking against a contrary wind over Albemarle Sound to Edenton, two gentlemen pursued him in a canoe, pleading with him "to go back and preach in their parish churches on the Sunday."<sup>34</sup>

Clearly Joseph Pilmore found a welcome from churchmen throughout the coastal plain, especially from laymen, upon whose shoulders ecclesiastical leadership had fallen to a degree unparalleled in England. The traditional relationship between clergyman and lay vestry was increasingly being reversed, so that he was at their beck and call rather than vice versa, and in effect many vestries ran a congregationalist rather than an episcopal church.<sup>35</sup> This independent spirit in the parish, combined with the arduous itinerant labours expected of conscientious clergy and the lack of a bishop stationed in America, made it difficult to secure ordained replacements, and while the population multiplied the number of clergy dwindled. In 1762 there were seven, in 1764 six, in 1765 five, and although a superhuman effort on the part of Governor Tryon lifted the number to thirteen in 1767, by the time of Pilmore's visit in 1772 it had slipped to eleven.<sup>36</sup> This threw more and more responsibility upon educated laymen. Whitefield had noted that "in most places they have readers, who read a sermon every Sunday to the people."<sup>37</sup> Governor Tryon informed the S.P.G. that of such lay readers there were "two, three, or four, more or less, in each county."<sup>38</sup> The names of a few of these men have survived. The Earl of Granville's land agent, Francis Corbin, probably conducted the first Anglican services in Salisbury,<sup>39</sup> and a crown officer named William Hill read prayers in Brunswick Church when Josiah Quincy visited the area in 1773.<sup>40</sup> Lay readers furnished the most obvious source for native clergy, among whom were men like Peter Blinn, William Miller, and Charles Pettigrew,

the latter two being sent to England for authorization as late as 1775.<sup>41</sup>

Methodist preachers such as Pilmore, therefore, were accepted as lay readers in colonial chapels, and even churches, much more readily than they would have been in England. To some degree the Methodist preachers were even more acceptable, with their strong emphasis upon a spiritually renewed Church of England, their greater closeness to the common man, their everyday garb. Yet they acted with initiative, with courage, with authority, perhaps the more so because Mr. Wesley was not on hand to remind them that they were only laymen, after all, not ordained clergy. Except in administering the sacraments, however, they acted like true evangelical clergy, and undoubtedly came to feel like clergy. Certainly the normal pastoral itinerancy of the S.P.G. missionaries in whose steps they frequently followed did not seem strange or difficult to them—it was like a Methodist circuit back home.

When within a few months of Pilmore's visit other Methodist itinerants came over the Virginia border into the Piedmont, and even penetrated the mountains, they were often welcomed far more heartily than ordained Anglican clergy would have been. They clearly belonged on the pioneering trails, and at the same time filled a nostalgic longing for the Church of England, but that Church stripped of its pomp and power. A welcome even came from the dissenters flooding in from the British Isles, and from Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania. They might deliberately obstruct the efforts of the regular clergy, yet they readily became assimilated to the typical robust, evangelical frontier religion of almost any brand, but especially to the scaled down version of the Church of England offered by Methodism.<sup>42</sup> Some of the immigrants, of course, came from Methodist backgrounds, and to them Wesley's preachers were doubly welcome. In 1772-73, for instance, during his limited tours in North Carolina, Pilmore met Methodist acquaintances from London, New York, and Philadelphia.<sup>43</sup> Such Methodist immigrants brought with them the desire for Christian fellowship, and in some instances "were the means of raising up societies in the interior, while the preachers were labouring in the more Atlantic regions."<sup>44</sup>

Pilmore's visit probably bore little obvious fruit in the form of newly organized societies in North Carolina, though this is not certain. Rather its double effect was similar to Whitefield's tours—it kept alive the nostalgic desire for an evangelically reformed church with an English ethos, and it brought to spiritual awaken-

ing at least a few settlers and native Americans. The effective beginning of organized Methodism in North Carolina came through infiltration from Virginia of a revival led by an American priest of the Church of England improbably allied with an English Methodist lay itinerant preacher. Nor was this partnership important for North Carolina only. William Warren Sweet expressed it well when he spoke of the Virginia-North Carolina area as constituting "the cradle of American Methodism," though perhaps it would be more accurate to give this title to the larger southern region of Maryland-Virginia-North Carolina.<sup>45</sup> Here were combined in the middle 1770's a rapidly rising rate of immigration, a strong urge towards individualism and political independence of Britain, and a warm revivalistic type of religion which nevertheless through the upbringing and convictions of its leaders preserved strong strands of loyalty to the traditions of the Church of England embedded in Wesley's Methodism. In doctrine, in worship, in Christian fellowship, in social concern, even in church polity, the American Methodism which was to be reared in this cradle to serve the whole nation was moulded much more than ever it realized by British influences.

In all this the itinerant labours of the Rev. Devereux Jarratt (1733-1801), rector of Bath parish in Dinwiddie county, Virginia, were crucial, even though he did cool off when in 1784 it became quite apparent that the Methodists were going far beyond their initial purpose of reviving the Church of England from within.<sup>46</sup> Jarratt was already conducting a widespread and successful evangelical ministry within a radius of fifty miles of Bath when in March, 1773, there came to his house for a week (to use Jarratt's own words), "Mr. Robert Williams, . . . a plain, artless, indefatigable preacher of the gospel."<sup>47</sup> Williams had not been sent to America as one of Wesley's official missionaries, apparently because—and this seems strange in view of his relationship with Jarratt—he was so tactlessly critical of Anglican clergy in England. When he first came out at his own expense in 1769 he was little more than a local preacher, although he had served in a probationary capacity as an itinerant preacher in Ireland for two years. Pilmore remained somewhat suspicious of him as a free lance, and his name moved on and off the *Minutes* of the British Conference.<sup>48</sup> Of his general loyalty to Wesley's principles, however, there could be no doubt. Certainly he convinced Jarratt that the underlying purpose of Methodism was to revitalize the Church of England, so that Jarratt, himself cold-shouldered by most of the neighbouring clergy

in Virginia and North Carolina, with the one temporary exception of Archibald McRoberts,<sup>49</sup> wholeheartedly threw in his lot with the Methodists. Nor was there any doubt of the appeal to the settlers of Williams' sincerity and simple eloquence. Asbury paid him this tribute: "Perhaps no one in America has been an instrument of awakening so many souls as God has awakened by him."<sup>50</sup> As an evangelistic team Jarratt and Williams met with great success. Possibly in 1773, certainly by 1774, reinforced by other Methodist itinerants, they pushed south through the Virginia counties of Brunswick and what is now Greenville into the neighbouring counties in North Carolina.<sup>51</sup>

Within a month of his arrival in 1773 to take over from young Francis Asbury the reins of American Methodism, Thomas Rankin summoned the first American Conference, and the *Minutes* of these annual gatherings supply nationwide statistics of membership. Until that year the Baltimore area had constituted the Methodist stronghold, largely because of Robert Strawbridge's pioneering ventures, and his success in recruiting native preachers. The *Minutes* reveal both a steady acceleration in the growth of southern Methodism as a whole, and a rapid acceleration along what might be called the southern frontier. By the end of the Revolutionary War Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina contained six-sevenths of the nation's Methodists, and occupied the energies of two-thirds of the itinerant preachers.<sup>52</sup> Growth was especially rapid in North Carolina, and this was reflected in the increasing number of preachers stationed in the state, whose own efficacy in turn served to maintain the growth in membership. At its inception in 1776 the North Carolina circuit was credited with the third largest membership in the nation; by the following Conference it had overtaken Baltimore, and was second only to Brunswick in southern Virginia.

In August, 1775, Francis Asbury accepted an invitation to North Carolina, "to go and form a circuit in Currituck county, where they have very little preaching but what they pay for at the rate of three pounds per sermon." Asbury fell ill, however, so that he did not visit the state until 1780, though he retained a warm interest in its spiritual prosperity.<sup>53</sup> Asbury's senior at the time, both in years and in authority, was Thomas Rankin, the Scotsman whom Wesley had sent out to superintend all the work in America. Asbury had accepted the invitation to Currituck because this was a natural extension of his responsibilities as Assistant, or superintendent preacher, in charge of the Norfolk circuit. As General

Assistant Rankin was not restricted to any one circuit. Realizing the potential of North Carolina, in September, 1775, he wrote informing John Wesley that he planned to visit that colony. On October 20 Wesley replied: "I am glad you are going into North Carolina; and why not into South Carolina too? I apprehend those provinces would bear much fruit, as most parts of them are fresh, unbroken ground. And as the people are farther removed from the din of war, they may be more susceptible of the gospel of peace."<sup>54</sup>

Like Asbury, however, Rankin also was forced to defer his visit, though in his case only for a few months. In the meantime his close friend George Shadford was meeting with great success in Brunswick Circuit, with which Devereux Jarratt's societies were officially linked in the spring of 1776.<sup>55</sup> The natural extension of this work was over the state border into the counties of Halifax and Bute<sup>56</sup>—which in 1779 was divided between Warren and Franklin counties. When the preachers assembled for their Conference in Baltimore, beginning May 21, 1776, Rankin wrote, "None gave me greater pleasure to see than my worthy friend and fellow laborer, Brother Shadford."<sup>57</sup> Rankin thus summarized the reports given: "If we had reason to mourn over the decrease of the work in the northern circuits, we had abundant cause to bless the Lord for the great increase in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. We had added to our number upwards of two thousand members this last year, and the preachers increased also."<sup>58</sup> The elevation of North Carolina into an independent circuit during that conference seems to have been little more than a formality agreed upon in advance—one with which the distant Mr. Wesley would surely have agreed, as would Asbury, also absent, through illness. Not only was the new circuit credited with 683 members; it was staffed by a full complement of three preachers, as many as any other circuit, while New York (with 132 members) and Philadelphia (with 137) were still served by only one preacher each.<sup>59</sup>

Immediately after the conference Rankin went north to a round of duties in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, though all the time, he stated, "I endeavoured to dispatch my business as fast as I could in order to set off for Virginia and Carolina."<sup>60</sup> In Virginia the revival was gathering momentum. Rankin collected a number of testimonies and personal letters which on his return to England in 1778 he sent with a covering letter to John Wesley, who published them as a thirty-six-page pamphlet, *A Brief Narrative of the Revival of Religion in Virginia*; this went through four editions in two years, and another in 1786. Eventually he managed to spend a few

hot but rewarding July days in North Carolina. He reported to Wesley: "Monday, [July] 15, I rode toward North Carolina. In every place the congregations were large, and received the word with all readiness of mind. I know not that I have spent such a week since I came to America." On Sunday, July 21, he said, "I preached at Roanoke Chapel to more than double of what the house would contain. In general the white people were within the chapel, and the black people without. The windows being all open everyone could hear, and hundreds felt the word of God. Many were bathed in tears, and others rejoicing with joy unspeakable."<sup>61</sup> On Tuesday, July 23, he crossed over to the south side of the Roanoke River, "and rode to the church of a friendly clergyman who gives the use of that and another church to our preachers and people. Many attended the word, and I was enabled to speak with freedom. The Lord crowned with his blessing our assembling together, and his powerful presence was peculiarly felt in meeting the members of the different societies, some of which had come from far."<sup>62</sup> Thus Thomas Rankin was able to return north, and (after two war-harassed years) to England, with a genuine personal enthusiasm for this promising extension of Virginia Methodism into North Carolina. Nor was Asbury less enthusiastic when later he took over its direction. Both were ably seconded by a significant sprinkling of British immigrants as well as by native Americans.

It is important to notice how during the formative colonial and revolutionary years British-born preachers continued to gravitate both to the south and to positions of leadership. Of the ten preachers stationed in 1773 only one was born in America, William Watters.<sup>63</sup> Of the nineteen in 1774 three were itinerants sent over from England by Wesley: Francis Asbury, Thomas Rankin, and George Shadford; eight were British immigrants who had come out on their own: Edward Dromgoole,<sup>64</sup> John King,<sup>65</sup> Robert Lindsay,<sup>66</sup> Daniel Ruff,<sup>67</sup> Thomas Webb,<sup>68</sup> Abraham Whitworth,<sup>69</sup> Robert Williams, and Joseph Yearbry;<sup>70</sup> eight appear to have been born in America: William Duke, Philip Ebert, Philip Gatch, Isaac Rollins, John Wade, William Watters, and Richard Webster. The position was not much changed in 1775, though an interesting phenomenon may be observed: all five preachers assigned to Virginia (out of a total of twenty for the nation) were of British origin. To a lesser degree the same thing continued throughout the Revolution. The British itinerant preachers sent over by Wesley for the most part returned home, as did a few of the volunteer missionaries. A solid nucleus of preachers with a British back-

ground, however, was left to strengthen the work during the perilous years when an appreciation of the British heritage might so easily be interpreted as treachery to the cause of political independence. At the head of this stabilizing force was Francis Asbury, whose example and statecraft were to earn him election as bishop at the close of the war. This little suspected British influence can be seen in the stationing of the preachers in the proliferating circuits in North Carolina.

When the first North Carolina Circuit was formed in 1776 the Assistant was the Irish native, Edward Dromgoole, with two American-born preachers, Isham Tatum and Frank Poythress (one of Jarratt's converts) as colleagues under his oversight. In 1777 the Assistant in charge was again a British native, John King, supported by another, John Dickins,<sup>71</sup> and two Americans. By 1778 Asbury was the only one of Wesley's itinerants left on the American stations, but several British natives supported him in his change of national allegiance: Edward Dromgoole, now Assistant of the Sussex Circuit, and John Dickins, now Assistant of the Brunswick Circuit, both in Virginia. The North Carolina Circuit had now been subdivided into three, with William Glendenning, a British native,<sup>72</sup> in charge of Roanoke, Leroy Cole, a Virginian, in charge of Tar River, and James O'Kelly, surely of Irish background,<sup>73</sup> in charge of New Hope.

Undoubtedly it was the message and personality of the Methodist preachers which won the settlers' allegiance, but their British background proved no serious obstacle when allied to demonstrable American patriotism. Indeed it achieved some important side effects. Nationally, especially through the strong advocacy of Francis Asbury, it delayed the declaration of ecclesiastical independence until 1784, and at that time ensured an episcopal church organized largely as a combination of the British Methodist Society and the Church of England rather than one with a frankly presbyterian or congregationalist polity. In the state of North Carolina it seems to have preserved Methodist links with the widely discredited Anglicans, taking over much of their missionary work, and succeeding to many of their church buildings.

Throughout the Revolutionary War Asbury continued to seek close co-operation with the Anglican clergy, himself worshipped in Anglican churches, and urged the mutual sharing of services, eventually seeing this as a valid reason why (in Virginia at least) "the Methodists are most likely to have permanent success, because the inhabitants are generally Episcopalians."<sup>74</sup> The first native

itinerant, William Watters, entered into this same spirit, maintaining, "We considered ourselves at this time [1777] as belonging to the Church of England," and expressing amazement how in spite of this and the many hazards of war the work made such rapid progress.<sup>75</sup> Not all the preachers agreed, of course, and a division into northern episcopal Methodism and southern presbyterian Methodism was narrowly averted when in 1779 a group of young American-born southerners formed a presbytery and ordained each other.<sup>76</sup> Asbury continued to maintain his allegiance to the Church of England in spite of opposition from some of his colleagues, however, and persuaded them at least to defer any radical change until the end of the war.<sup>77</sup> It seems that the eager desire for the Lord's Supper, which fed the urge to secure an ordained ministry of their own, was especially strong among those Methodists who had their roots in the Church of England, and a few weeks after the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church Asbury remarked, "Nothing could have better pleased our old Church folks than the late step we have taken in administering the ordinances."<sup>78</sup> Apparently even a breach with the Church of England hierarchy was not too high a price to pay in order to secure the regular administration of the sacraments. Yet even then the Anglican ties were not completely severed.

The Church of England in North Carolina, as elsewhere, tended to be the prerogative of the aristocracy, the stronghold of Toryism. As such it was a natural target for lower middle class envy and patriotic pressure.<sup>79</sup> Wesley's preachers were almost always lower in the social scale than the Anglican clergy, for the most part being self-educated men, though making up in evangelistic zeal and warm pastoral concern what they might lack in formal learning. The British preachers greatly admired one clergyman, however, John Wesley, and he became their ideal of a Church of England missionary, whom most of them wished to emulate. An integral element in his character was an undying resolve to remain a member and minister within the Church of England, and he never ceased to urge his followers to similar loyalty. This too, therefore, his followers learned from him, though with varying degrees of enthusiasm. In a sense it was easier for them to be thus loyal in North Carolina than in England, for here the Church was less entrenched, and here its patterns of activity were markedly similar to those of the Methodist societies in England, with the missionary traveling round a circuit of preaching-places, and employing laymen as helpers just as Wesley did. Undoubtedly a few came to see themselves

as helping to bring about an American renewal of the Church of England.

The departure for England of the more aristocratic and Tory of the clergy, together with the wealthiest of the laity, made this still more possible. The huge exodus during the war left the Church tottering. Not only almost all the clergy subsidized by the S.P.G. went, but many of those in self-supporting parishes. Only a tiny fraction remained.<sup>80</sup> Actually North Carolina seems to have fared better than most states. George Micklejohn, although he left St. Matthew's Church, Hillsborough, remained in the area.<sup>81</sup> Nathaniel Blount continued to minister in his native Beaufort county.<sup>82</sup> Charles Pettigrew served intermittently as Rector of St. Paul's, Edenton, after his resignation in 1784, and eventually became the first bishop-elect of North Carolina.<sup>83</sup> He was especially co-operative with the Methodists, even attending their Quarterly Meetings, as did Devereux Jarratt in Virginia.<sup>84</sup> Leonard Cutting, who came to New Bern in 1785, was also friendly to the Methodists.<sup>85</sup> An ecumenical movement in himself was Robert Johnston Miller, an immigrant Scot who became a Methodist preacher in Virginia, attended the first Methodist Annual Conference held in North Carolina (1785), traveled with Dr. Thomas Coke and discussed with him Coke's plans to bring Methodism solidly into the fold of the Protestant Episcopal Church, then located in Lincoln county, accepting Lutheran ordination in 1794 in order the better to serve his flock as a minister of the Protestant Episcopal Church.<sup>86</sup>

As their clergy either left the continent or prudently became less highly visible the sturdy middle class patriot laymen gained even more power, and most of them were ready wholeheartedly to embrace the emphasis upon freedom of conscience which had been one of the pillars of the colony's first charter.<sup>87</sup> They welcomed the proliferating Methodists to their churches, and the Methodist preachers to their pulpits. It seems almost certain that a welcome was also available for other mainstream dissenting denominations, but one which was less cordial and less frequently accepted. It was a fairly natural process that the Anglican and Methodist groups should coalesce and continue to use the Anglican building. Indeed from the beginning the groups seem to have overlapped.

No census seems to have been attempted of these colonial Anglican churches, but the piecing together of clues from the printed *Colonial Records*, from local and county histories, and other sources, has resulted in a list of at least sixty buildings, in addition to many more preaching points, usually in people's

homes.<sup>88</sup> Some of the Anglican congregations continued to occupy their own buildings, even in two or three instances (as we have seen) served by their former clergy.<sup>89</sup> In 1790 there were the feeble beginnings of Episcopal consolidation by the summoning of the first North Carolina Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, prompted by Bishop William White.<sup>90</sup> Sometimes the church was destroyed or fell into ruin, like St. Matthew's at Hillsborough.<sup>91</sup> Frequently it became a community building, available for public gatherings of various types, including religious services by different denominations, like St. John's in Williamsboro, Vance County,<sup>92</sup> the old wooden church at Halifax, in Halifax County,<sup>93</sup> and the rebuilt church at Hillsborough.<sup>94</sup> Many of them, however, especially in the north and east, seem to have become more closely associated with the Methodists than with any other group: Moyock, Coinjock and the Narrows Chapels in Currituck;<sup>95</sup> Fork Chapel in Camden county, rebuilt jointly by the Episcopalians and the Methodists in 1792;<sup>96</sup> possibly Newbegun Church in Pasquotank;<sup>97</sup> St. John's Chapel in Hertford, Perquimans;<sup>98</sup> Costen's Chapel and Knotty Pine Chapel in Gates;<sup>99</sup> four, possibly more, in Halifax county—Conoconara, Whitaker's Chapel, Eden (Beaverdam Swamp), and Cypress Chapel;<sup>100</sup> Banks Chapel, in Wilton, Granville County;<sup>101</sup> Lee's Chapel in Caswell County;<sup>102</sup> St. Thomas's Church, Merryhill, and Bridge Creek Chapel, in Bertie;<sup>103</sup> St. John's Church, Beaufort, Straits Chapel, and Bell's Chapel, in Carteret County;<sup>104</sup> and Waccamaw Chapel, in Columbus County.<sup>105</sup> More extensive research might well modify some of these details, and almost certainly bring more examples to light. It is likely, however, that the general picture will remain the same.

These findings seem sufficiently documented already to necessitate a revision of the traditional view of the post-Revolution Anglican fortunes. Joseph Blount Cheshire wrote: "In Edenton, Newbern, and Wilmington, the Church people held together. . . . At the other extremity of the state Parson Miller gathered together the handful of Churchmen of Lincoln and Rowan counties . . . from 1785 until the happy revival under Bishop Ravenscroft. . . . But in all the intervening country the Church went utterly to decay."<sup>106</sup> Perhaps it would be fairer to say that the colonial Church of England was in some measure at least fused with the Methodist Episcopal Church, its religious witness renewed and rechanneled rather than suffering from complete disintegration. Certainly Methodism in North Carolina remained the most English-oriented Church, nor were its relations with the Protestant

Episcopal Church marred by the bitter antagonisms which developed between Methodism and the Church of England in Britain during the nineteenth century. In many areas there was effective co-operation, and in the state as a whole the one Episcopal Church supplemented the other, the Episcopalians being strongest in their original territory, the eastern seaboard, while the Methodists spread themselves ~~were~~ widely, but were more notably stronger in the west.<sup>107</sup>

John Wesley's dream of a Church of England renewed by means of his Methodist Societies did not come true in his native land. In America, however, there was no fear of the exuberant new Methodist Episcopal Church being overpowered or ignored by the parent body—the Revolution had almost reversed their traditional English roles. Yet this episcopal daughter had entered into the heritage of her Anglican mother as well as that of her Methodist father, so that John Wesley's vision was almost realized in America, and especially in North Carolina.

more/

Int. Carol  
Rockingham  
County  
Bertie  
VNC  
Class papers  
1803-12  
have  
xeroxed