

ographical material on Williams can be found in B. F. DeCosta, *Three Score and Ten: The Story of St. Philip's Church* (1889).

GRAHAM HODGES

**WILLIAMS, Robert** (c. 1745–26 Sept. 1775), pioneer Methodist preacher, was born probably in England, but nothing is known about his parents or his birth. His first recorded appearance was as a young preacher in the open air at Whitehaven, a seaport in Cumberland, England, on Sunday 29 June 1766. As Methodist leader John Wesley reported on the event, "At one Robert Williams preached in the market-place to some thousands of people, all quiet and attentive." Later that year Wesley sent Williams to northeast Ireland to serve under James Rea, whom Wesley had urged to promote open-air evangelism, noting on 21 July that "Robert Williams . . . is usually a reviver of the work wherever he comes." On 2 May 1767 Wesley wrote to Mrs. Sarah Crosby about "an amazing increase of the work of God within these few months in the North of Ireland," praising the five preachers who labored there—including Rea and Williams—as "men devoted to God, men of a single eye, whose whole heart is in the work." In 1767 Wesley moved Williams on to Castlebar to work under William Penington, Wesley's favorite colporteur-preacher. Penington died later that year, but not before Williams learned from him the great value of distributing tracts and books wherever he preached.

On 5 May 1769 John Wesley was in Manorhamilton, County Leitrim. After encountering Williams again, he entered a warning note in his journal: "There was a general love to the gospel here till simple R[obert] W[illiams] preached against the clergy." By this time Williams seems to have heard of Wesley's publication of Thomas Taylor's appeal from New York on 11 April for "an able experienced preacher." In any event, he would surely have heard of the brief discussion of the matter at the 1768 English Methodist Conference. Toughened, but by no means disheartened, by his three years in Ireland, he offered his services for America. Although Williams was not the fully trusted senior preacher Wesley wanted for America, he accepted Williams's eager offer, provided that he could secure his own passage and would remain under the oversight of the two authorized preachers whom Wesley planned to send from the following conference.

Permission, no matter how conditional, was sufficient for Williams. He wrote to Thomas Ashton, a Dublin Methodist, who agreed to pay his passage and emigrate with him. In August 1769 they disembarked in Philadelphia and received a welcome there from the infant Methodist society, which paid Williams's shipboard and laundry expenses before setting him on his way to New York. With no senior British preacher yet available to supervise him, Williams exercised his own considerable initiative, heeding perhaps especially his training by Penington. He had brought many Wesley pamphlets, notably sermons and hymns. Speedily he

gave Philadelphia printer John Dunlap the twenty-four pages of Charles Wesley's *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*, an edition printed by William Pine of Bristol in 1762. The cost of printing 300 copies (surely by prior agreement) was registered in the old "Cash Book" still preserved in St. George's United Methodist Church, Philadelphia, on 7 October 1769—not far in advance of the book's projected use at Christmas.

This enterprise, begun during his first few weeks in America, was apparently for Williams the planned birth of what became the Methodist Publishing House. Undoubtedly he carried to New York in his saddlebags still other Wesley publications for him—or his successors—to expound or to sell for a few pence, thus building up, as Wesley so constantly urged, "a reading people." No one knows exactly how many Wesley books Williams published and sold. It appears likely, however, that the tangible extant evidence of ten Wesley items (usually in single copies, printed in 1769–1771 by John Dunlap, James Adams, and Isaac Collins) represented a larger publishing enterprise by Williams during his late twenties. Jesse Lee, the first historian of American Methodism, and one of Williams's converts, testified that he "had reprinted many of Mr. Wesley's books, and had spread them through the country, to the great advantage of religion" (p. 48).

Williams arrived in New York City early in September 1769 and remained in touch with the John Street society for two years, as evidenced by his many expenses noted in the account book there, stretching from September 1769 to August 1771. Here he arranged for the printing in October 1769 of the first American class-tickets (known as "love-feast tickets," securing admission to a popular Methodist ritual). With the arrival of Wesley's missionary Richard Boardman in New York at the end of October, Williams journeyed south to Baltimore (probably to assist the freelance Methodist preacher Robert Strawbridge) via Philadelphia, where Wesley's missionary Joseph Pilmore made his own initial assessment: "[Williams] came over to America about business [apparently his bookselling], and . . . Mr. Wesley gave him a license to preach occasionally under the direction of the regular preachers. During his stay in the city he preached several times, and seemed to have a real desire to do good. His gifts are but small, yet he may be useful to the country people, who are, in general, as sheep without shepherds" (pp. 25, 96). Later he was glad to welcome Williams to his Philadelphia pulpit.

When in 1771(?) Williams preached the first Methodist sermon in Norfolk, Virginia, he mounted the steps of the courthouse and gathered a crowd by singing the Wesley hymn "Come, Sinners, to the Gospel Feast," which had been published by Charles Wesley in *Redemption Hymns* (1747). Almost certainly Williams had arranged for James Adams to reprint these fifty-two hymns at Wilmington in 1770 and probably also Isaac Collins in Burlington, New Jersey, in 1771. In Virginia Williams attracted the attention of the Anglican Devereux Jarratt, in Bath Parish, Dinwiddie County; Jarratt later described Williams as "the first

Methodist preacher I ever conversed with, or saw, in Virginia, . . . a plain, simple-hearted pious man." Williams stayed with him about a week in March 1773 and preached several sermons in the parish. "I liked his preaching in the main very well," Jarratt reported, "and especially the affectionate and animated manner in which his discourses were delivered." The end of Jarratt's account is typical: "Mr. Williams also provided me with some of their books" (pp. 107-8).

During his first two years in America Williams was a tireless salesman of Wesley's books and Wesley's gospel along the eastern seaboard. That gospel, of course, was that human beings are sinful and need the salvation offered by their savior Jesus Christ, which is a free gift from God in response to their faith in Him, by which they might be given spiritual certainty, perfect love on earth, and perfect happiness in heaven. With the coming in 1773 of Thomas Rankin as John Wesley's "General Assistant," discipline was tightened. At the first American Conference that summer (as well as at the 1773 British Conference) Williams, stationed in Petersburg, Virginia, was officially recognized as one of the ten regular itinerant preachers in America. He acknowledged the unrest among his brethren about his printing and agreed with them that he should no longer reprint Wesley's works without the consent of both Wesley and his colleagues. The conference instructed him "to sell the books he has already printed, but to print no more."

Jesse Lee pictured Williams as "a plain, artless, indefatigable preacher of the gospel" who "proved the goodness of his doctrine by his tears in public, and by his life and conduct in private." Thirty-five years after Williams's death, claimed Lee, "The name of Robert Williams still lives in the minds of many of his spiritual children" (p. 43). He reportedly married and settled down ("located" in American Methodist parlance) in a home on the main road between Portsmouth and Suffolk, in Virginia, where he died. To Francis Asbury fell the task of preaching his funeral sermon on Thursday, 28 September 1775, and the chore of settling his estate, including the problems of his many Wesley publications. In preaching the sermon Asbury paid a magnanimous tribute: "Perhaps no one in America has been an instrument of awakening so many souls as God has awakened by him" (vol. 1, p. 164).

• The best edition of the British *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences* is that published in London by John Mason (1862), vol. 1; for early American Methodism see Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists* (1810; repr. in facsimile, 1974). Francis Asbury, *The Journal and Letters*, ed. Elmer T. Clark et al. (3 vols., 1958), is standard. Frank Baker, *From Wesley to Asbury: Studies in Early American Methodism* (1976), contains much original research. C. H. Crookshank, *History of Methodism in Ireland* (3 vols., 1885-1888), remains standard. Joseph Pilmore, *Journal*, ed. F. E. Maser and H. T. Maag (1969), is very valuable. For Williams's important contacts with Devereux Jarratt see the autobiographical *Life of the Reverend Devereux Jarratt* (1806). J. P. Pilkington, *The Methodist Publishing House*, vol. 1 (1968), contains valuable mate-

rial, including illustrations, and incorporates much of the research of Leland D. Case. J. B. Wakeley, *Lost Chapters Recovered from the Early History of American Methodism* (1858), is an early treasure trove.

FRANK BAKER

**WILLIAMS, Robert Ramapatnam** (16 Feb. 1886-2 Oct. 1965), chemist and nutritionist, was born in Nellore, India, the son of Robert Rannels Williams and Alice Evelyn Mills, missionaries. His mother educated him at a Baptist mission in Ramapatnam. After an accident crippled his father, the family returned to the United States in 1896. Williams attended schools in Kansas and California before enrolling in 1905 at Ottawa University in Kansas. Two years later he transferred to the University of Chicago, where he received bachelor's and master's degrees in chemistry in 1907 and 1908, respectively. He met Augusta Parrish at Ottawa. They married in 1912 and had four children.

Following the acquisition of the Philippines by the United States in 1898, Williams felt that it was the responsibility of Americans to help Filipinos develop into free and responsible citizens. In 1908 he became a teacher there and in 1909, a chemist with the Bureau of Science in Manila. The bureau, a mix of American and Filipino scientists, sought to combat disease, the Philippines then having the world's highest mortality rate. Edward Vedder, an army doctor at the bureau, studied tropical diseases and brought Williams into his investigation of beriberi, a leading killer among infants and children. Vedder linked the disease to polished rice, a dietary staple prepared by removal of the husk and outer layer of natural rice. He found that an extract made from the polishings had antiberiberi activity and asked Williams to try to isolate the active agent. From 1910 to 1915 Williams devoted himself to the task. He prepared active concentrates and distributed these to health clinics, where they proved effective in overcoming beriberi. He could not, however, isolate the active agent from the heterogeneous mixture.

In 1915 Williams yielded to the desire of Filipinos to take over the bureau and returned to the United States, where he worked at the Bureau of Chemistry of the Department of Agriculture. After World War I he left government service for private industry, his salary being insufficient to support his wife and children. In 1919 he joined a small research laboratory at the Western Electric Company, a subsidiary of the Bell system. It grew in size and importance to become in 1925 the Bell Telephone Laboratories, with Williams as its chemical director.

During his Bell years, from 1919 to 1945, Williams independently continued his beriberi research in the garage of his New Jersey home with the help of Bell volunteers. In 1927 he was able to increase his effort with the first of annual \$5,000 grants from the Carnegie Corporation. In 1928 Columbia University offered him laboratory space and the assistance of Columbia scientists. He now worked on a much larger scale, preparing extracts from tons of rice polishings. In 1933 he succeeded in isolating the pure, crystalline an-

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