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Introduction . . . . .	3
<i>S T Kimbrough, Jr.</i>	
The Rev. Dr. Frank Baker (1910–1999) . . . . .	7
<i>Richard P. Heitzenrater</i>	
The Rev. Dr. Tore Meistad (1942–2000) . . . . .	9
<i>S T Kimbrough, Jr.</i>	
John and Charles Wesley: Brothers in Arms . . . . .	11
<i>John A. Newton</i>	
Charles Wesley, Junior: Prodigal Child, Unfulfilled Adult . . . . .	23
<i>Gareth Lloyd</i>	
The Missiology of Charles Wesley: An Introduction . . . . .	37
<i>Tore Meistad</i>	
The Altar and the Cross: The Atonement in <i>Hymns on the Lord's Supper</i> . . .	61
<i>Daniel B. Stevick</i>	
His Spirit in These Mysterious Leaves: A Wesleyan Way of Reading . . . . .	81
<i>Maxine E. Walker</i>	
Songs of the Heart: Writings of Early Methodist Women . . . . .	99
<i>Paul Wesley Chilcote</i>	
Pastoral Values in the Works of Charles Wesley . . . . .	115
<i>Frederick E. Maser</i>	

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## **The Rev. Dr. Frank Baker (1910–1999)**

**Methodist Historian**

**Professor Emeritus of English Church History  
Duke University, Durham, North Carolina**

**Richard P. Heitzenrater**

*The Divinity School, Duke University*

The death of Frank Baker on October 11, 1999, represents the end of an era in Methodist studies. Generally acknowledged as the preeminent Wesley scholar of the last fifty years, he helped set the agenda and model the standards for the study of Charles and John Wesley. Long known as an avid book collector and meticulous researcher, Baker performed foundational work in Wesleyan bibliography and textual criticism that provided the basis for a new level of scholarship in the field.

Born in Kingston-upon-Hull on April 15, 1910, Frank graduated Bachelor of Arts from the University of London in 1931. Three years later he earned his Bachelor of Divinity degree at Hartley-Victoria in Manchester. He was in 1937 ordained a Methodist minister and married his childhood sweetheart, Ellen E. Levitt (Nellie).

Frank Baker exhibited both the heart of a pastor and the mind of a scholar in a career that spanned over sixty years on both sides of the Atlantic. A prize-winning essay on John Wesley's Christian Library set him on a course of study from which he never swerved for nearly seven decades. While serving as a minister on English Methodist circuits, he collected Wesleyana with the hope of obtaining every edition of every work that Wesley published, numbering over two thousand. Over a twenty-year span of ministry in England, he became a major contributor to the scholarly work of the Wesley Historical Society. In addition to his pastoral duties and independent studies, he also completed a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Nottingham in 1952.

A conversation with Dr. Albert C. Outler of Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, at the end of the 1950s revealed a common interest in the need for a critical edition of the works of John Wesley. Dr. Baker was attracted in 1960 by Dean Robert Cushman to The Divinity School of Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, and was named Professor of English Church History. He took with him to Duke his vast collection of Methodistica, the second largest in the world (next to the Methodist Archives in Manchester), consisting of more than 15,000 items. These materials, including the only known copies of more than fifty titles, are now housed in the Duke library system, which has within the last month opened the Baker Methodist Research Center.

Frank was probably best known for his editorial leadership in the Wesley Works Editorial Project. He was the bibliographer and textual editor of the

Project from its inception in 1960 and the editor-in-chief from 1969 to 1986. He also had primary responsibility for two volumes of Wesley's letters as part of that projected 35-volume edition, which was begun by Oxford University Press and has been continued by Abingdon Press.

Professor Baker's extensive bibliography includes thirty books and over two hundred articles. His treatment of *John Wesley and the Church of England* (1970) is still the classic work on that topic. His extensive collection of Charles Wesley materials provided the basis for an important biographical study, *Charles Wesley as Revealed in his Letters* (1948) and a detailed literary study, *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley* (1960). His major bibliographic survey appeared as *A Union Catalogue of the Publications of John and Charles Wesley* (1966; 2nd ed. 1991). His collection of essays, *From Wesley to Asbury* (1976), includes work on early American Methodism. He was a principal editor of the *Encyclopedia of World Methodism* (1974) and contributed eighty entries. The wide range of his interests and his exuberant pursuit of antiquarian detail is further evident in his many articles, which plumb topics from printers' flowers to political intrigue.

As a teacher, Professor Baker was a friend of students. His home was a special haven for international students, past and present, and he and Nellie for years sponsored Friday evening badminton sessions for hundreds of students at the Duke gym. An avid sports fan, his undergraduate religion courses in the 1960s attracted members of Duke's famed basketball team, whose games he and Nellie attended faithfully. His divinity courses in Methodism helped train a generation of United Methodist ministers. His guidance of seven doctoral dissertations helped furnish leadership for another generation of Wesley scholars. And his unselfish willingness to assist anyone with a serious research question made him a magnet for queries worldwide on Methodist studies. While the new edition of Wesley's works remains a monument to Frank Baker's scholarly mind, a worldwide network of friends remains a testimony to his outgoing heart.

Frank is survived by his wife, Nellie, two daughters, a son, and six grandchildren.