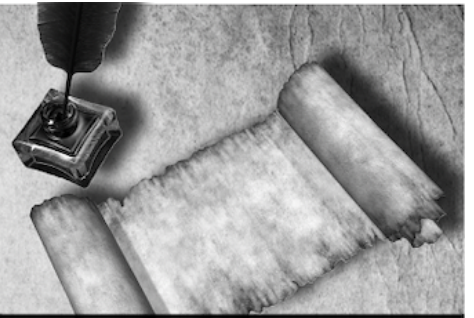


HISTORIAN'S DIGEST



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A Message from our President: Ivan Corbin



As I write this article it is the day before the first Sunday of Advent. Tomorrow we will sing one verse of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" after lighting the Candle of Hope. It is also getting very close to the anniversary of the time in 2020 when we first heard about this novel new virus called Covid-19 that would forever change our lives and world. Finding hope became even more essential during a global pandemic, political upheavals, wars breaking out or continuing all over the globe, and all sorts of other social, economic, and ecclesiastical challenges.

This morning the Florida Annual Conference met one final time via Zoom (I had never even heard of Zoom 4 years ago) to approve the final disaffiliations of 74 more churches. I thought this final round would not impact me like the earlier departures, but I still felt a strong sense of loss and sadness mixed with relief. One of the churches approved was the church where I preached my first sermon and was recommended for candidacy in the United Methodist Church. Another was a church that my father-in-law had served. In some instances, as before, several UMC's in the same communities disaffiliated leaving no United Methodist presence in those communities. How could things have been different if we had created a provision where if more than one congregation in a community was discerning whether to stay or leave that one would be required to stay for those from all congregations who wanted to stay could find a home? Along with the rest of you I mourn the loss of these sister congregations, the shared history as United Methodists, and in many cases, the relationships with other clergy and laypersons who now view one another with some level of suspicion or even outright animosity and/or bitterness.

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Editor's Column: Mike Feely

Dear readers,

I hope this issue of *Historian's Digest* finds you having a blessed Advent and Christmas season. I am always amazed at how busy this time of year can be (and how quickly the time can pass). We do live in a world of constant motion and busy-ness. It certainly has been a busy fall as well for those of us involved in United Methodist history. In early November, our Southeastern Jurisdiction Commission on Archives and History met at Emory University to see the new site of the SEJCAH archives. Earlier this year we had moved those archives from the former Heritage Center at Lake Junaluska to the Pitts Theology Library at Emory. This was my first visit to the archives at Pitts, and it was an amazing place to visit. The immense amount of Methodist and Wesleyan material there is staggering. While we were there, we were shown some special items from the collection, including one of John Wesley's diaries! United Methodism is blessed with some wonderful archives, and Pitts Theology Library is certainly worth a visit. It is good to know that our SEJCAH archives have found a good home and will continue to be available to researchers and others interested in Methodist history.



One of the articles in this issue, "Seeding the Garden of Methodism," celebrates that great span of United Methodist history. 250 years ago, Methodism was growing in Maryland, and Robert Strawbridge was one of the earliest of the itinerant preachers to help share the good news in the American colonies. The article details some great history, but also is a reminder of the dedication of the members of the Strawbridge Shrine Association in their work to preserve the legacy of Robert Strawbridge and early Methodism. The Strawbridge Shrine is also definitely worth a visit and is not too far from some other important historical sites in Methodism.

Strawbridge Shrine Association

"The First Home of Methodism in America"
2650 Strawbridge Lane, New Windsor, MD 21776

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Even in these busy and troubled times, history provides us a place to pause and renew our perspectives. I'm hoping in 2024 to visit a few more archives, and to take time to see some of the historic sites and shrines of Methodism. I would encourage all of us to do the same.

And after you have made that visit, take a moment to write a few thoughts about what you have seen and experienced! We would love to print some of those essays in an upcoming edition of *Historian's Digest*! We are always looking for articles, reflections, and commentary on Methodist history, and would love to hear from you. Please write me at revfeely@yahoo.com.

I hope that you have a wonderful Christmas.

Mike

Mike Feely
Co-Editor



Message from our President: continued from page 1

And yet, during this season of Advent we will all gather in our respective local congregations and proclaim messages of hope, love, joy, and peace that must transcend our UM divisions and all the other horrors, fears and messiness of the world in which we live, so that we can once again proclaim the message of both the first coming and the anticipated second coming of Jesus the Christ: the God who is with us. All the world cries out desperately for the hope of the Gospel.

Next Fall we are scheduled to gather for our annual meeting which will also be a convocation. This gathering will include members of the HSUMC, Methodist scholars, the Western Jurisdiction, and others. The postponed General Conference of 2020 will have taken place along with Jurisdictional conferences. The future coming out of these regional and general

meetings is uncertain, but what is certain is that we who are charged with the Ministry of Memory will have much to reflect upon and help interpret. Also, in a practical vein, it will be time to nominate new officers and board members for the HSUMC, something that was supposed to happen in 2020. I challenge you all to pray and think about who you desire in leadership. We will also be challenged by whatever changes are approved across United Methodism prior to our meeting, not to mention all the previous disaffiliations. This meeting will be pivotal for the future of our organization as we gather to explore and celebrate our past and begin moving into a new future as a denomination and as an organization.

As we live through this current period in human history, may we continue to be engaged in the Ministry of Memory in such a way as we can learn from our past, live boldly in our present and declare hope for the future. O come, O come, Emmanuel! May we all experience the hope, love, joy, and peace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In Christ's service,

Ivan

Ivan G. Corbin, President
HSUMC

Save the Date

**HISTORICAL SOCIETY
2024 ANNUAL MEETING**

September 9-13, 2024

In Bozeman, Montana

**Hosted by the Western Jurisdiction
and GCAH**

More details to follow. Check the HSUMC
website for details: TBA

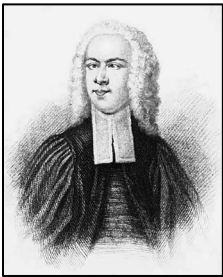
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“Seeding the Garden of Methodism: Robert Strawbridge on Maryland’s Eastern Shore”

By Rev. Bob Kells, reprinted by permission of the author and Strawbridge Shrine Association

The United States will observe its 250th anniversary in 2026. In conjunction with this observance, the Strawbridge Shrine Association is running a series of articles that look back 250 years to the life and times of Robert Strawbridge. This is the second article in the series.

Robert Strawbridge was the first of the unofficial itinerant Methodist preachers to arrive in the British North American colonies. Settling with his wife, Elizabeth, at Sam’s Creek in what was then Frederick (today’s Carroll) County, Maryland, Robert soon began the missionary journeys that made him famous, at least in Methodist circles. Robert Strawbridge left no written record of his trips. However, the accounts of other early Methodists indicate that his travels fanned out from Sam’s Creek to Baltimore and Frederick in Maryland, northern Virginia, and southern Pennsylvania. Mr. Strawbridge is credited with many firsts. Thus, it should come as no surprise that he was the first of the Wesleyan Methodist preachers to visit the area that became known as the “garden of Methodism”—Maryland’s eastern shore.¹



George Whitefield

The earliest Methodist influence to reach the peninsula made up of Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia, came from England in the form of Rev. George Whitefield. Whitefield was a sometimes colleague of John Wesley. The two had met at Oxford University when Whitefield joined the “Holy Club,” a student prayer group led by Rev. John Wesley that also included Wesley’s brother, Charles. Although Whitefield had the form of a Methodist, his Calvinist theology—especially his emphasis on predestination and limited atonement—set him apart from Wesley’s Arminian views, which included unlimited atonement for all.

Whitefield was one of the finest speakers of his day and was well-known throughout England. In 1739, he set sail for America and landed in Lewes, Delaware, where he began the first of several evangelistic tours that helped spark the First Great Awakening. Whitefield’s first preaching stop at St. Peter’s Church in Lewes attracted a couple of hundred people. His fame increased during a preaching tour that took him to Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Maryland’s western shore. When Whitefield returned to Lewes in May 1740, he preached outdoors to a crowd of some two thousand. A few of those gathered there were moved to form a small Methodist society, but it lasted only until 1742.²



Captain Thomas Webb

The next efforts to bring Methodism to the Eastern Shore came from north and south. In 1769, Captain Thomas Webb, a lay preacher from the New York society founded by Philip Embury, arrived in New Castle County, Delaware. Webb

¹ Several of the early circuit riders used the garden imagery to describe the Eastern Shore. Most notably, Henry Boehm, son of the more famous Martin Boehm, wrote: “The Peninsula that lies between the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays...was the garden of Methodism in America.” Quoted in William H. Williams, *The Garden of American Methodism, The Delmarva Peninsula, 1769-1820*, (Frederica, DE: The Commission on Archives and History of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference of the UMC, 1984, reprint edition 2009), xi-xiii.

² Barbara Duffin and Philip Duffin, *Cultivating the Methodist Garden, a brief history of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference of the United Methodist Church*, (Frederica, Delaware: Barratt’s Chapel Museum, 2000), 5.

was a veteran of the Seven Years War (known in the British colonies as the French and Indian Wars). When the war ended in 1763, he became a man in search of a new mission in life. He found it in religion. After dabbling in Moravianism, Captain Webb became a Methodist lay preacher. At his own initiative, he sailed to New York, joined the society there in 1766, and began a traveling ministry. Still bearing the marks of a warrior—he often wore his uniform while preaching and a distinctive green patch over his right eye—Webb often preached fiery sermons intended to move the soul. His preaching was given to an “abundance of visions and revelations,” making him an “enthusiast” even among Methodists. Webb traveled to Philadelphia in 1767 where his sense of discipline and organizational skills helped revitalize the local Methodist society.³ Webb’s preaching in Delaware met with some success, but the organization and establishment of a strong Methodist presence in northern Delaware would be up to other traveling preachers.

One other note about Captain Thomas Webb’s career is important to the Strawbridge story. Webb preached in northern Maryland in the late 1760s and early 1770s. One of the people he preached to was Rebecca Dorsey Ridgely, the wife of a wealthy planter, Captain Charles Ridgely. Rebecca became a devout Methodist not long after hearing Webb. She aided the Methodist itinerant preachers by providing meals and a place to stay as they carried out their work for the Lord. This connection would prove vital to the future course of Robert Strawbridge’s life. For it was Charles Ridgely—likely at the behest of his profoundly Methodist wife—who provided Robert Strawbridge and family a farm on the Ridgely plantation north of Baltimore. The Strawbridges moved there in 1776.⁴

Robert Strawbridge provided the southern approach of Methodism to the Maryland peninsula. In late 1769 or early 1770, two Methodists from one of the western Maryland societies founded by Strawbridge visited John Randle on his farm near Worton in Kent County. They prayed with Randle and arranged for Robert Strawbridge to come to Randle’s home to preach. The direct outcome of Strawbridge’s preaching there is not recorded; however, a Methodist society was formed at Randle’s home by 1773, and a meeting place, Worton Chapel, was constructed before the end of the 18th century.

The Strawbridge influence on the Delmarva continued to play a role through itinerant preachers who were raised up in the Methodist way by Robert Strawbridge. William Watters, who converted to Methodism through Strawbridge’s preaching, became the first American-born Methodist itinerant preacher. In 1773 and 1774, Watters was serving several Methodist groups in Kent and Cecil counties. Philip Gatch, another Strawbridge protégé, served the Kent Circuit in the 1770s where he encountered both verbal and physical resistance to his work. And Freeborn Garrettson, another American-born Methodist preacher, was inspired by the preaching of Robert Strawbridge, along with that of Joseph Pilmoor and Francis Asbury.⁵

Robert Strawbridge made only one recorded trip to Maryland’s Eastern Shore. Even so, that trip proved consequential for the planting and spread of Wesleyan Methodism in the region. Within a few years, Methodist societies were formed in Kent and Cecil Counties. Strawbridge-inspired circuit riders continued to build up the first societies and spread the gospel further south and east in the years prior to the American Revolution. In effect, Robert Strawbridge planted the seeds that later circuit riders watered and nurtured, thus allowing for God to provide the growth of faith communities that continue to make a kingdom difference today.

³ Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800, The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture*, (Princeton University Press, 2000), 35.

⁴ Tucker Adkins, “The Experience” of Rebecca Ridgely: The Religious Memoir of a Maryland Gentlewoman, 1786-1798,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* (Fall/Winter 2021): 211.

⁵ Williams, *The Garden of American Methodism*, 27-30.

2024: 150 Years of Cuban Methodism

By The Rev. Ivan G. Corbin

On October 27th, 1492, Christopher Columbus and his expedition landed on the northern shore of what we now know as the island of Cuba. Thinking they had landed in India, the indigenous people Columbus and his crew encountered were called “Indians.” Cuba was claimed for Spain and the influence of both Spain and the Roman Catholic Church would soon take root there and throughout the Caribbean and beyond.

In 1513 another explorer named Juan Ponce De Leon would sail along the coast of what he named “La Florida” and probably skirted what we now know as the Florida Keys and Key West and then up the Gulf Coast before going on to Cuba. Spain added Florida and much of what is now part of the southern United States, Mexico, Central and South America to their empire. All of this also came under the religious influence of the Roman Catholic Church.

For the next 300 + years both Florida and Cuba were under Spanish rule (except for about 20 years following the end of the Seven Years War in 1863 when Great Britain took possession. Britain even held Havana until the Treaty of Paris when Spain traded sparsely populated Florida for Havana and Manila). Spain held Florida once again until February 22, 1819, when the United States acquired La Florida. Florida became an official territory of the United States on March 30, 1822, and a state on March 3, 1845. Upon becoming a territory of the United States, Protestant denominations, including the Methodist Episcopal Church in Mississippi and South Carolina, sent missionaries. These missionaries came to the populated areas of Pensacola and Fernandina Beach and established congregations, three of which celebrated their bicentennials in 2022. 2022 was also the bicentennial of the City of Key West, located on a four by two-mile island at the southwestern tip of the Florida Keys and about 150 miles southwest of Miami.

On December 20, 1821, John W. Simonton purchased Key West from a Spaniard named Juan P. Salas who had received the island on August 26, 1815 from the Governor of Florida for services rendered to the Spanish government. Salas did nothing to improve the island and John Simonton of Mobile had heard of the island’s advantageous location, deep water harbor and the prospects that lay ahead because of Florida becoming a US Territory. For the sum of \$2,000 the deed was transferred to Mr. Simonton on January 19, 1822. The island soon became home to transplants from St. Augustine, The Bahamas, South Carolina, New England, and many other states in the Union. On March 25 Lieutenant M. C. Perry of the US Navy raised the US flag over the island which began a relationship between Key West and the US military that continues to this day. At the time of Perry’s arrival, the primary purpose of the Navy’s presence was to pursue the real “pirates of the Caribbean.” In 1824 Monroe County was created and Key West was named the county seat.

John Simonton quickly sold several sections of the island to other investors including Pardon Greene of Rhode Island. Pardon established trade with northern and southern states as well as Cuba some time before 1838. Along with the influx of settlers came the introduction of various religious groups. Initially most of those in Key West worshipped together. In 1837, Samuel Kemp brought Wesleyan Methodism to Key West from the Bahamas. He initially hosted worship in his home and then provided land for the first Methodist meeting house. In 1844 the First Methodist Episcopal Church was founded.

One of the early businesses that grew tremendously was cigar making. “Segar” manufacturing is recorded as early as 1831. Another business that made many Key Westers wealthy was the wrecking industry, salvaging goods and lives from the countless ships that wrecked on the Florida Reef before the establishment of a

permanent light house system. By 1860 Key West was the 2nd largest city in the state of Florida, only 44 people smaller than Pensacola. By 1890, Key West was Florida's largest city. It was also the wealthiest city in Florida at that time.

In 1868 the Cuban people launched another revolt against Spain. Many of them fled the revolution and made their way the 90 miles across the Florida Straits to Key West. Because cigar making was an important industry in Cuba, many of these immigrants brought their skills with them and by 1876 there were 29 cigar factories employing 2,100 people, most of whom were "Skilled Havana workmen." By 1876, 46 members of the First Methodist Episcopal Church, South were Cuban because of intentional mission work that had begun among the Cuban immigrants just two years earlier.

At the Florida Annual Conference of the MECS in January 1873 in Fernandina Beach Joseph E. A. Van Duzer was admitted on trial. According to his memoir, little is known about Van Duzer's early life. He was born in New York City in 1852 and his mother died when he was young. His father is described as a "wanderer", so Joseph was raised by his grandmother. He received a decent education and showed promise as a merchant. In 1871 he married Clara Bell Foggin in New York City and in August of the next year she gave birth to their son, George. Clara Bell died the day after George's birth, and it appears George did not survive either. It was soon after the death of his wife that Joseph was advised to head south for his health. He ended up in Tallahassee in the fall of 1872 and there he made a commitment to Christ.

Having no Spanish speaking person available and Rev. Van Duzer more than willing to learn Spanish as he served, during Annual Conference on January 11, 1874, he was appointed to the Cuban Mission located in Key West and sent there to serve under the guidance and vision of Rev. Charles Fulwood, Pastor of First Charge. In December of 1874, Van Duzer was reappointed to his work among the Cuban population for 1875.



Sadly, Rev. Van Duzer fell victim to what was almost an annual plague of Yellow Fever. On June 7, 1875, Van Duzer succumbed to this dread disease but not before speaking these final words that are inscribed on his tombstone in the Key West Cemetery: "Don't Give Up the Cuban Mission." According to Rev. Fulwood, Joseph "... did not live to see a Cuban converted or added to the Church, but he firmly believed that the good seed that had been sown in the way of Bibles and tracts distributed among them, would someday, if followed up by suitable Christian effort, bring forth a glorious harvest... His end was peace."¹

The spring before Van Duzer's death an almost 33-year-old Lay missionary originally from the Canary Islands and raised in Cuba arrived in Key West to help with the Cuban Mission. Francisco Diaz had come to the US at the age of 21, landing in Key West first and finding his way to Jacksonville, Charleston, and Augusta (Georgia) before settling in Savannah, Georgia. It was there that he converted from Catholicism under the ministry of Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church. He, like Joseph Van Duzer, had lost his wife and suffered from ill health, so at the recommendation of his brothers and sisters in Christ at Trinity he made his way to Key West to offer his services to Rev. Fulwood. Upon the death of Van Duzer, he was assigned to the Cuban Mission. Unfortunately, Francisco died of consumption on December 3, 1875 at the parsonage of First MECS. Though his ministry among his fellow Cubans was very short lived, Fulwood shared "he lived long enough to see a number of his countrymen converted, and forty-six added to the Church."²

¹ 1876 *Journal of the Florida Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, p. 13.

² *Ibid*, p. 14.

From these unlikely beginnings the mission indeed was not given up but grew to fulfill predictions made by Rev. Fulwood that not only would the work in Key West and Florida flourish, but in 1883 missionaries, Enrique (Henry) Someillan and Aurelio Silvera from Key West would go to Cuba under the auspices of the Florida Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.³ When much of the cigar industry moved from Key West to Tampa and Ybor City, missionaries from Key West helped establish missions in the greater Tampa Bay area. By the end of the 1890s the Key West mission had grown enough to build their own church building and it was called La Trinidad. Somewhere in this time frame the ME Church also had established a mission in Key West that became El Salvador Methodist Episcopal Church. Years later these two congregations became El Salvador Methodist/United Methodist Church.

In 1994 while I had the privilege of serving as Pastor of First United Methodist “Old Stone” Church, the “Mother Church” of Cuban Methodism, it was decided by members of four of the five United Methodist Churches on the island that the time had come to merge and become “Key West United Methodist Church.” El Salvador UMC had made the difficult decision to close its doors earlier in the year, but many of its members were also active in the other UM churches on the island. So, after celebrating the 150th anniversary of First UMC, members of First, Ley Memorial, Fleming Street and El Salvador United Methodist churches came together and completed a circle that had begun with the faithfulness of their ancestors in the Methodist churches that had preceded them.

The Cuban Methodist Church became autonomous in 1968. Several decades later after much prayer and constant hope, Cuban Methodists were allowed to worship once again, many of whom were able to regain their properties. A revival began that continues to this day and out of that revival a relationship was initiated in 1997 by Florida Conference United Methodists and the Cuban Methodist Church called the Cuba-Florida Covenant. Its name changed to Methodists United in Prayer and now is called Cuba Ministry which is open to all expressions of the Christian faith. The purpose of this covenant is to build relationships, be in prayer for each other and to provide pastoral support and, if possible, support for the congregations when possible. Over the years caravans of United States Methodists have visited their sister churches and many Cuban pastors and spouses have been able to visit their sister churches here in the United States. On two such visits to churches in Havana and on the Isle of Youth, I met Cuban Methodists who not only know the names of the original missionaries Someillan and Silvera that came to their country from Key West, but they celebrate the work that took root on two islands 90 miles apart that began with the dying words of Rev. Joseph E. A. Van Duzer: “Don’t give up the Cuban Mission!” 150 years later the seeds that were planted on the island of Key West are still bearing fruit.

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