

----- Through The Years -----

The Methodist movement of John Wesley, which took hold in the middle of the eighteenth century, had many obstacles to overcome. Indeed, there was no established clergy and the original goals of Rev. Wesley were to keep the movement within the Anglican Church. During the colonial period eight of the thirteen colonies actually had state religions, although they all tolerated other forms of worship. Five colonies: New York, Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina and South Carolina all recognized the Anglican Church as the state religion. Three colonies: Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire recognized the Congregational Church as their state religion. Five colonies: Delaware, Rhode Island, Georgia, Pennsylvania and New Jersey had no state religion.

It was in this environment that our Methodist faith had to begin to win souls. The early Methodists were looked down upon by other denominations. Following the Revolutionary War, the president of Yale College, Ezra Stiles, a Congregationalist minister, forecasted that there would be little room in America's future for "westleians (Wesleyans) and Baptists". I'm glad I didn't have him forecasting for me.

Wesley sent eight British missionaries over to the US between 1769 and 1774. These men recruited preachers who went across the country bringing the message of Christ to people, many of whom had no other access to Christian meetings. These preachers were the famous Circuit Riders. After the Revolutionary War, only Francis Asbury remained. Eventually Thomas Coke was sent to America by Wesley. Coke, along with Asbury, helped establish the Methodist Episcopal Church, in the USA, following a conference in Baltimore. The conference began on December 24, 1784 and became known as the "Christmas Conference".

Methodism experienced tremendous growth in the years following this conference. From a small obscure group in the middle of the eighteenth century, it became the dominant Christian denomination by the middle of the nineteenth century. The willingness to endure hardships and bring the Methodist word to Americans, wherever they were located, gave us the widely held faith we know today. I guess those Wesleyans did have a future in America after all.

Do you have any MUMC history you would like to share with the congregation? Please send it to:

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