

Autobiography of Peter Cartwright

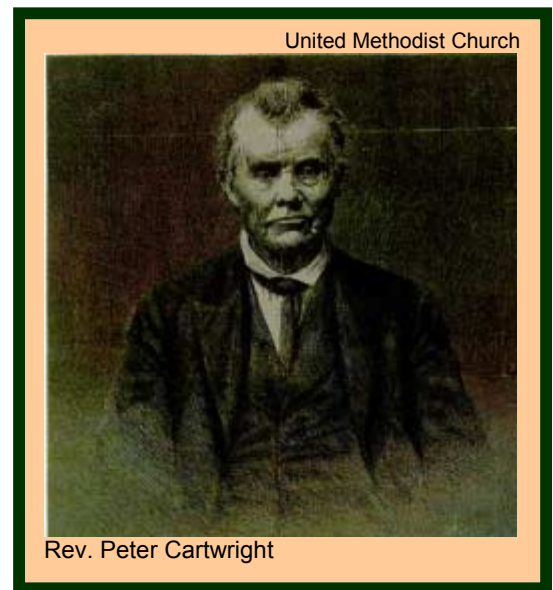
The Backwoods Preacher

1856 excerpts

ed. W. P. Strickland, The Methodist Book Concern, 1856.

PREFACE.

For many years past, and especially during the last ten or twelve, I have been almost unceasingly importuned to write out a history of my life, as one among the oldest Methodist traveling preachers west of the mountains. This would necessarily connect with it a history of the rise and progress of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the great valley of the Mississippi. And surely a work of this kind, written by a competent historiographer, who had kept himself posted, or had kept a journal of his life, and the many thrilling incidents connected with the history of the Church, or the life of a pioneer traveling preacher, could not fail to interest the Church and many of her friends, and would rescue from oblivion many, very many incidents that are now lost, and gone forever beyond the reach of the historian's pen. . . .

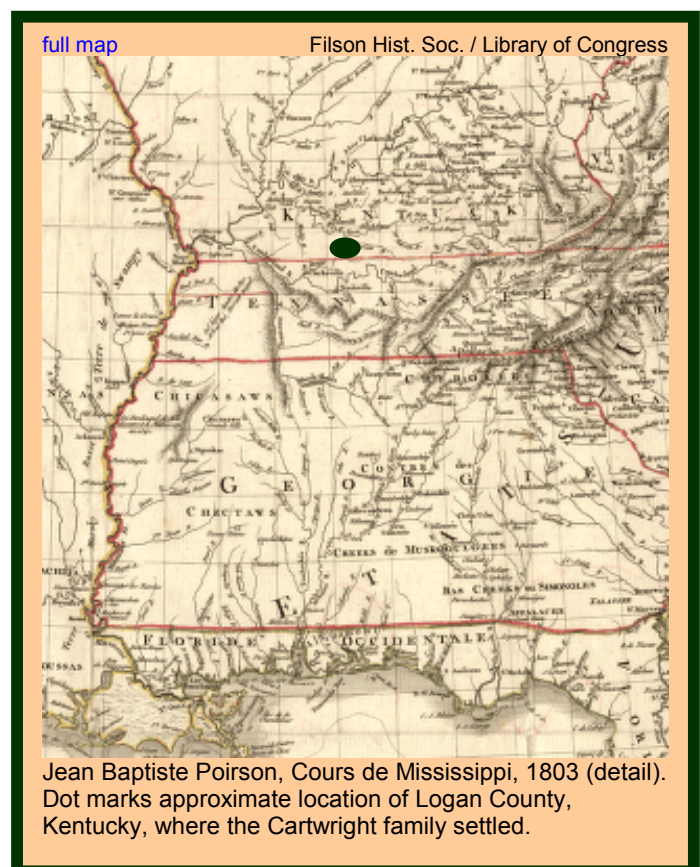


Right here I wish to say, (I hope without the charge of egotism,) when I consider the insurmountable disadvantages and difficulties that the early pioneer Methodist preachers labored under in spreading the Gospel in these Western wilds in the great valley of the Mississippi, and contrast the disabilities which surrounded them on every hand, with the glorious human advantages that are enjoyed by their present successors, it is confoundingly miraculous to me that our modern preachers cannot preach better, and do more good than they do. Many nights, in early times, the itinerant had to camp out, without fire or food for man or beast. Our pocket Bible, Hymn Book, and Discipline constituted our library. It is true we could not, many

or us, conjugate a verb or parse a sentence, and murdered the king's English almost every lick. But there was a Divine unction attended the word preached, and thousands fell under the mighty power of God, and thus the Methodist Episcopal Church was planted firmly in this Western wilderness, and many glorious signs have followed, and will follow, to the end of time. . . .

I was born September 1st, 1785, in Amherst County, on James River, in the State of Virginia. My parents were poor. My father was a soldier in the great struggle for liberty, in the Revolutionary war with Great Britain. He served over two years. My mother was an orphan. Shortly after the united colonies gained their independence, my parents moved to Kentucky, which was a new country. It was an almost unbroken wilderness from Virginia to Kentucky at that early day, and this wilderness was filled with thousands of hostile Indians, and many thousands of the emigrants to Kentucky lost their lives by these savages. There were no roads for carriages at that time, and although the emigrants moved by thousands, they had to move on pack horses. Many adventurous young men went to this new country. The fall my father moved, there were a great many families who joined together for mutual safety, and started for Kentucky. Besides the two hundred families thus united, there were one hundred young men, well armed, who agreed to guard these families through, and, as a compensation, they were to be supported for their services. After we struck the wilderness we rarely traveled a day but we passed some white persons, murdered and scalped by the Indians while going to or returning from Kentucky. . . .

Kentucky was claimed by no particular tribe of Indians, but was regarded as a common hunting-ground by the various tribes, east, west, north, and south. It abounded in various valuable game, such as buffalo, elk, bear, deer, turkeys, and many other smaller game, and hence the Indians struggled hard to keep the white people from taking possession of it. Many hard and bloody battles were fought, and thousands killed on both sides; and rightly was it named the "land of blood." But finally the Indians were



overpowered and driven off, and the white man obtained a peaceable and quiet possession.

It was chiefly settled by Virginians, as noble and brave a race of men and women as ever drew the breath of life. But Kentucky was far in the interior, and very distant from the Atlantic shores; and though a part of the great Mississippi Valley, the mouth of the Mississippi and thousands of miles up this “father of waters” belonged to foreign, and, in some sense, hostile nations, that were not very friendly to the new republic.

The Kentuckians labored under many, very many, disadvantages and privations; and had it not been for the fertility of the soil and the abundance of wild meat, they must have suffered beyond endurance. But the country soon filled up, and entered into the enjoyment of improved and civilized life. . . .

Shortly after our removal from Lincoln to Logan County my father’s family was visited by Jacob Lurton, a traveling preacher of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Though my father was not a professor of religion, yet he was not an opposer of it, and when Jacob Lurton asked the liberty of preaching in his cabin, he readily assented.

I was then in my ninth year, and was sent out to invite the neighbors to come and hear preaching. Accordingly they crowded out, and filled the cabin to overflowing. Jacob Lurton was a real son of thunder. He preached with tremendous power, and the congregation were almost all melted to tears; some cried aloud for mercy, and my mother shouted aloud for joy. . . .

Shortly after Jacob Lurton preached at my father’s cabin, he or his successor organized a small class, about four miles from my father’s, where my mother attached herself again to the Church. I think there were thirteen members, one local preacher, one exhorter, and a class-leader. Here my mother regularly walked every Sabbath to class-meeting, for a number of years, and seldom missed this means of grace. This little society ebbed and flowed for years, until about 1799, when a mighty revival of religion broke out, and scores joined the society. We built a little church, and called it *Ebenezer*. This was in what was then called Cumberland Circuit, and Kentucky District, in the Western Conference, the seventh conference in the United States.

Logan County, when my father moved to it, was called “Rogues’ Harbor.” Here many refugees, from almost all parts of the Union, fled to escape justice or punishment; for although there was law, yet it could not be executed, and it was a desperate state of society. Murderers, horse thieves, highway robbers, and counterfeiters fled here until they combined and actually formed a majority. The honest and civil part of the citizens would prosecute these wretched banditti, but they would swear each other clear; and they really put all law at defiance, and carried on such desperate violence and outrage that the honest part of

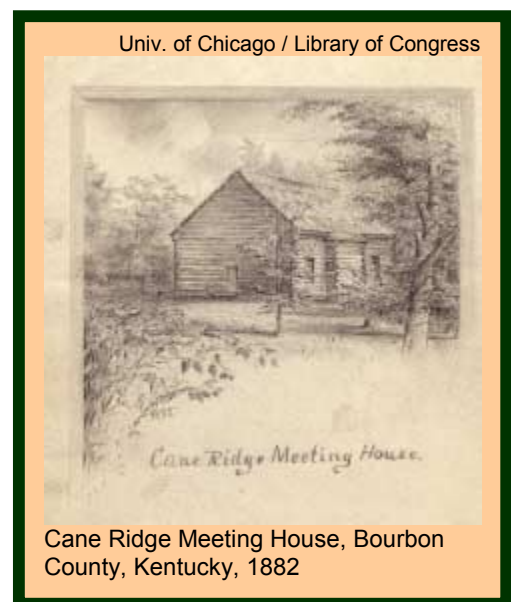
the citizens seemed to be driven to the necessity of uniting and combining together, and taking the law into their own hands, under the name of Regulators. This was a very desperate state of things. . . .

I was naturally a wild, wicked boy, and delighted in horse-racing, card-playing, and dancing. My father restrained me but little, though my mother often talked to me, wept over me, and prayed for me, and often drew tears from my eyes; and though I often wept under preaching, and resolved to do better and seek religion, yet I broke my vows, went into young company, rode races, played cards, and danced.

At length my father gave me a young race-horse, which well-nigh proved my everlasting ruin; and he bought me a pack of cards, and I was a very successful young gambler; and though I was not initiated into the tricks of regular gamblers, yet I was very successful in winning money. This practice was very fascinating, and became a special besetting sin to me, so that, for a boy, I was very much captivated by it. My mother remonstrated almost daily with me, and I had to keep my cards hid from her; for if she could have found them, she would have burned them, or destroyed them in some way. O, the sad delusions of gambling! How fascinating, and how hard to reclaim a practiced gambler! Nothing but the power of Divine grace saved me from this wretched sin. . . .

Time rolled on, population increased fast around us, the country improved, horse-thieves and murderers were driven away, and civilization advanced considerably. Ministers of different denominations came in, and preached through the country; but the Methodist preachers were the pioneer messengers of salvation in these ends of the earth. Even in Rogues' Harbor there was a Baptist Church, a few miles west of my father's, and a Presbyterian congregation a few miles north, and the Methodist *Ebenezer*, a few miles south. . . .

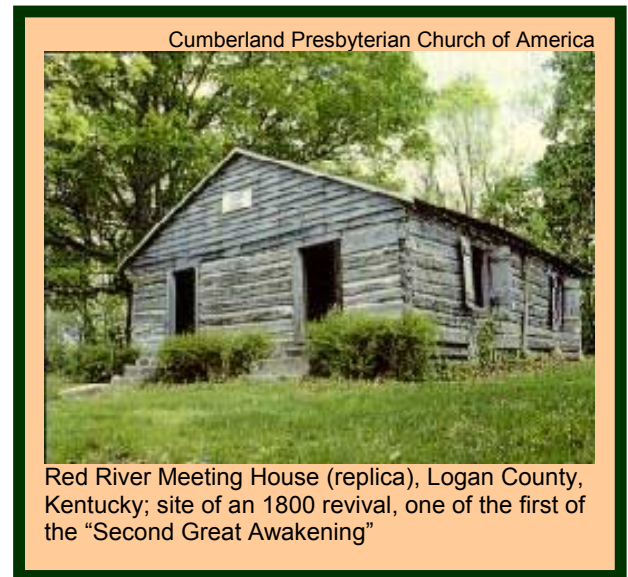
Somewhere between 1800 and 1801,¹ in the upper part of Kentucky, at a memorable place called "Cane Ridge," there was appointed a sacramental meeting by some of the Presbyterian ministers, at which meeting, seemingly unexpected by ministers or people, the mighty power of God was displayed in a very extraordinary manner; many were moved to tears, and bitter and loud crying for mercy. The meeting was protracted for weeks. Ministers of almost all denominations flocked in from far and near. The meeting was kept up by night and day. Thousands heard of the mighty work, and came on foot, on horseback, in carriages and wagons. It



¹ August 1801, near Lexington.

was supposed that there were in attendance at times during the meeting from twelve to twenty-five thousand people. Hundreds fell prostrate under the mighty power of God, as men slain in battle. Stands were erected in the woods from which preachers of different Churches proclaimed repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and it was supposed, by eye and ear witnesses, that between one and two thousand souls were happily and powerfully converted to God during the meeting. It was not unusual for one, two, three, and four to seven preachers to be addressing the listening thousands at the same time from the different stands erected for the purpose. The heavenly fire spread in almost every direction. It was said, by truthful witnesses, that at times more than one thousand persons broke out into loud shouting all at once, and that the shouts could be heard for miles around.

From this camp-meeting, for so it ought to be called, the news spread through all the Churches, and through all the land, and it excited great wonder and surprise; but it kindled a religious flame that spread all over Kentucky and through many other states. And I may here be permitted to say, that this was the first camp-meeting ever held in the United States, and here our camp-meetings took their rise. . . .



In 1801, when I was in my sixteenth year, my father, my eldest half brother, and myself, attended a wedding about five miles from home, where there was a great deal of drinking and dancing, which was very common at marriages in those days. I drank little or nothing; my delight was in dancing. After a late hour in the night, we mounted our horses and started for home. I was riding my race-horse.

A few minutes after we had put up the horses, and were sitting by the fire, I began to reflect on the manner in which I had spent the day and evening. I felt guilty and condemned. I rose and walked the floor. My mother was in bed. It seemed to me, all of a sudden, my blood rushed to my head, my heart palpitated, in a few minutes I turned blind; an awful impression rested on my mind that death had come and I was unprepared to die. I fell on my knees and began to ask God to have mercy on me.

My mother sprang from her bed, and was soon on her knees by my side, praying for me, and exhorting me to look to Christ for mercy, and then and there I promised the Lord that if he would spare me, I would seek and serve him; and I never fully broke that promise. My mother prayed for me a long time. At length we lay down, but there was little sleep for me. Next morning I rose, feeling wretched

beyond expression. I tried to read in the Testament, and retired many times to secret prayer through the day, but found no relief. I gave up my race-horse to my father, and requested him to sell him. I went and brought my pack of cards, and gave them to mother, who threw them into the fire, and they were consumed. I fasted, watched, and prayed, and engaged in regular reading of the Testament. I was so distressed and miserable, that I was incapable of any regular business.

My father was greatly distressed on my account, thinking I must die, and he would lose his only son. He bade me retire altogether from business, and take care of myself.

Soon it was noised abroad that I was distracted, and many of my associates in wickedness came to see me, to try and divert my mind from those gloomy thoughts of my wretchedness; but all in vain. I exhorted them to desist from the course of wickedness which we had been guilty of together. The class-leader and local preacher were sent for. They tried to point me to the bleeding Lamb, they prayed for me most fervently. Still I found no comfort, and although I had never believed in the doctrine of unconditional election and reprobation, I was sorely tempted to believe I was a reprobate, and doomed, and lost eternally, without any chance of salvation.

At length one day I retired to the horse-lot, and was walking and wringing my hands in great anguish, trying to pray, on the borders of utter despair. It appeared to me that I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Peter, look at me." A feeling of relief flashed over me as quick as an electric shock. It gave me hopeful feelings, and some encouragement to seek mercy, but still my load of guilt remained. I repaired to the house, and told my mother what had happened to me in the horse-lot. Instantly she seemed to understand it, and told me the Lord had done this to encourage me to hope for mercy, and exhorted me to take encouragement, and seek on, and God would bless me with the pardon of my sins at another time.

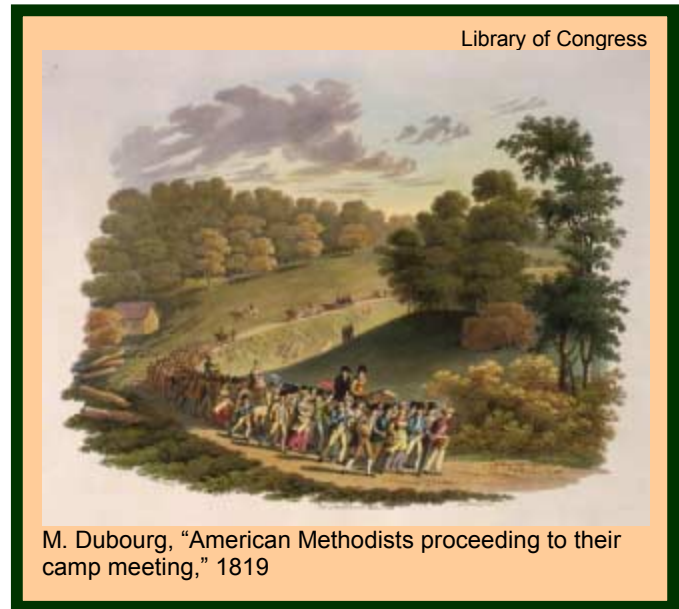
Some days after this, I retired to a cave on my father's farm to pray in secret. My soul was in an agony; I wept, I prayed, and said, "Now, Lord, if there is mercy for me, let me find it," and it really seemed to me that I could almost lay hold of the Saviour, and realize a reconciled God. All of a sudden, such a fear of the devil fell upon me that it really appeared to me that he was surely personally there, to seize and drag me down to hell, soul and body, and such a horror fell on me that I sprang to my feet and ran to my mother at the house. My mother told me this was a device of Satan to prevent me from finding the blessing then. Three months rolled away, and still I did not find the blessing of the pardon of my sins. . . .

There were no camp-meetings in regular form at this time, but as there was a great waking up among the Churches, from the revival that had broken out at Cane Ridge, before mentioned, many flocked to those sacramental meetings. The church would not hold the tenth part of the congregation.

Accordingly, the officers of the Church erected a stand in a contiguous shady grove, and prepared seats for a large congregation.

The people crowded to this meeting from far and near. They came in their large wagons, with victuals mostly prepared. The women slept in the wagons, and the men under them. Many stayed on the ground night and day for a number of nights and days together. Others were provided for among the neighbors around. The power of God was wonderfully displayed; scores of sinners fell under the preaching, like men slain in mighty battle; Christians shouted aloud for joy.

To this meeting I repaired, a guilty, wretched sinner. On the Saturday evening of said meeting, I went, with weeping multitudes, and bowed before the stand, and earnestly prayed for mercy. In the midst of a solemn struggle of soul, an impression was made on my mind, as though a voice said to me, "Thy sins are all forgiven thee." Divine light flashed all round me, unspeakable joy sprung up in my soul. I rose to my feet, opened my eyes, and it really seemed as if I was in heaven; the trees, the leaves on them, and everything seemed, and I really thought were, praising God. My mother raised the shout, my Christian friends crowded around me and joined me in praising God; and though I have been since then, in many instances, unfaithful, yet I have never, for one moment, doubted that the Lord did, then and there, forgive my sins and give me religion.



M. Dubourg, "American Methodists proceeding to their camp meeting," 1819



Methodist camp meeting, 1819

Our meeting lasted without intermission all night, and it was believed by those who had a very good right to know, that over eighty souls were converted to God during its continuance. I went on my way rejoicing for many days. This meeting was in the month of May. In June our preacher, John Page, attended at our little church, *Ebenezer*, and there in June, 1801, I joined the Methodist Episcopal Church, which I have never for one moment regretted. I have never for a

moment been tempted to leave the Methodist Episcopal Church, and if they were to turn me out, I would knock at the door till taken in again. . . .

Perhaps the first conference holden in the West was held in Kentucky, in April, 1789, and then at different points till 1800, when the Western Conference was regularly organized, and reached from Redstone and Greenbrier to Natchez, covering almost the entire Mississippi valley. I can find at this time a record of but ninety members in 1787, and five traveling preachers. From 1787 up to 1800, Bishop Asbury visited the Western world, called together the preachers in conferences, changed them from time to time, and regulated the affairs of the infant Church in the wilderness as best he could.

Several times the Western preachers had to arm themselves in crossing the mountains to the East, and guard Bishop Asbury through the wilderness, which was infested with bloody, hostile savages, at the imminent risk of all their lives. Notwithstanding the great hazard of life, that eminent apostle of American Methodism, Bishop Asbury, showed that he did not count his life dear, so that he could provide for the sheep in the wilderness of the West.

At the time I joined the Church in 1801, according to the best accounts that I can gather, there were in the entire bounds of the Western Conference, of members, probationers, colored and all, two thousand, four hundred and eighty-four, and about fifteen traveling preachers. In the United States and territories, East and West, North and South, and Canada, seventy-two thousand, eight hundred and seventy-four. Total, in Europe and America, one hundred and ninety-six thousand, five hundred and two. The number of traveling preachers this year, for all America and Canada, was three hundred and seven; and during the same year there were eight thousand members added to the Methodist Episcopal Church. . . .

From 1801 for years a blessed revival of religion spread through almost the entire inhabited parts of the West, Kentucky, Tennessee, the Carolinas, and many other parts, especially through the Cumberland country, which was so called from the Cumberland River, which headed and mouthed in Kentucky, but in its great bend circled south through Tennessee, near Nashville. The Presbyterians and

Methodists in a great measure united in this work, met together, prayed together, and preached together.

In this revival originated our camp-meetings, and in both these denominations they were held every year, and, indeed, have been ever since, more or less. They would erect their camps with logs or frame them, and cover them

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Frontier Methodism had a very large social influence. Once a week the class leaders called their classes together, and there the New Englander and the Southerner, "the Yorker" and the Eastern Shore man, the Teuton and the Celt mingled on a platform of exact equality. The class leader was a neighbor and friend, and freely and frankly they discussed their religious convictions, their fears and hopes together. They spoke and sang and prayed, and thus sectional prejudices passed and there was born a distinct Western spirit and feeling.

Sweet, *The Rise of Methodism in the West*, 1920, p. 67

with clapboards or shingles. They would also erect a shed, sufficiently large to protect five thousand people from wind and rain, and cover it with boards or shingles; build a large stand, seat the shed, and here they would collect together from forty to fifty miles around, sometimes further than that. Ten, twenty, and sometimes thirty ministers, of different denominations, would come together and preach night and day, four or five days together; and, indeed, I have known these camp-meetings to last three or four weeks, and great good resulted from them. I have seen more than a hundred sinners fall like dead men under one powerful sermon, and I have seen and heard more than five hundred Christians all shouting aloud the high praises of God at once; and I will venture to assert that many happy thousands were awakened and converted to God at these camp-meetings. Some sinners mocked, some of the old dry professors opposed, some of the old starched Presbyterian preachers preached against these exercises, but still the work went on and spread almost in every direction, gathering additional force, until our country seemed all coming home to God. . . .

In this revival, usually termed in the West the Cumberland revival, many joined the different Churches, especially the Methodist and Cumberland Presbyterians. The Baptists also came in for a share of the converts, but not to any great extent. Infidelity quailed before the mighty power of God, which was displayed among the people. Universalism was almost driven from the land. The Predestinarians of almost all sorts put forth a mighty effort to stop the work of God.

Just in the midst of our controversies on the subject of the powerful exercises among the people under preaching, a new exercise broke out among us, called the *jerks*, which was overwhelming in its effects upon the bodies and minds of the people. No matter whether they were saints or sinners, they would be taken under a warm song or sermon, and seized with a convulsive jerking all over, which they could not by any possibility avoid, and the more they resisted the more they jerked. If they would not strive against it and pray in good earnest, the jerking would usually abate. I have seen more than five hundred persons jerking at one time in my large congregations. Most usually persons taken with the jerks, to obtain relief, as they said, would rise up and dance. Some would run, but could not get away. Some would resist; on such the jerks were generally very severe.

To see those proud young gentlemen and young ladies, dressed in their silks, jewelry, and prunella,² from top to toe, take the *jerks*, would often excite my risibilities. The first jerk or so, you would see their fine bonnets, caps, and combs fly; and so sudden would be the jerking of the head that their long loose hair would crack almost as loud as a wagoner's whip. . . .

I always looked upon the jerks as a judgment sent from God, first, to bring sinners to repentance; and, secondly, to show professors that God could work with or without means, and that he could work

² Prunella: a twilled woolen dress fabric (Merriam-Webster).

over and above means, and do whatsoever seemeth him good, to the glory of his grace and the salvation of the world.

There is no doubt in my mind that, with weak-minded, ignorant, and superstitious persons, there was a great deal of sympathetic feeling with many that claimed to be under the influence of this jerking exercise; and yet, with many, it was perfectly involuntary. It was, on all occasions, my practice to recommend fervent prayer as a remedy, and it almost universally proved an effectual antidote.

There were many other strange and wild exercises into which the subjects of this revival fell; such, for instance, as what was called the running, jumping, barking exercise. The Methodist preachers generally preached against this extravagant wildness. I did it uniformly in my little ministrations, and sometimes gave great offense; but I feared no consequences when I felt my awful responsibilities to God. From these wild exercises, another great evil arose from the heated and wild imaginations of some. They professed to fall into trances and see visions; they would fall at meetings and sometimes at home, and lay apparently powerless and motionless for days, sometimes for a week at a time, without food or drink; and when they came to, they professed to have seen heaven and hell, to have seen God, angels, the devil and the damned; they would prophesy, and, under the pretense of Divine inspiration, predict the time of the end of the world, and the ushering in of the great millennium.

This was the most troublesome delusion of all; it made such an appeal to the ignorance, superstition, and credulity of the people, even saint as well as sinner. I watched this matter with a vigilant eye. If I opposed it, I would have to meet the clamor of the multitude; and if any one opposed it, these very visionists would single him out, and denounce the dreadful judgments of God against him. They would even set the very day that God was to burn the world, like the self-deceived modern Millerites. They would prophesy, that if anyone did oppose them, God would send fire down from heaven and consume him, like the blasphemous Shakers. They would proclaim that they could heal all manner of diseases, and raise the dead, just like the diabolical Mormons. They professed to have

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In 1805-06 Peter Cartwright was the preacher on the Scioto and Hocking Circuits, being moved from the former to the latter circuit in the middle of the year. The last Quarterly Conference of the year was a camp meeting conducted near the town of Marietta. To this meeting came a great crowd of "rabble and rowdies" on Sunday morning, "armed with dirks, clubs, knives, and horse-whips, and swore they would break up the meeting." While Cartwright was preaching one of the rowdies stood up on one of the seats on the women's side of the camp and began to talk and laugh. The preacher ordered him down, but with oaths he refused. The magistrates present were afraid to arrest the young rowdy, so Cartwright took a hand in the matter. After a general scuffle, in which the friends of law and order took the side of the preachers, order was finally restored, but only after thirty of the ruffians had been captured, and on Monday nearly three hundred dollars was collected in fines and costs.²¹

W. W. Sweet, *The Rise of Methodism in the West: being the Journal of the Western Conference, 1810-1811, 1920*, pp. 30-31.

converse with spirits of the dead in heaven and hell, like the modern spirit rappers. Such a state of things I never saw before, and I hope in God I shall never see again.

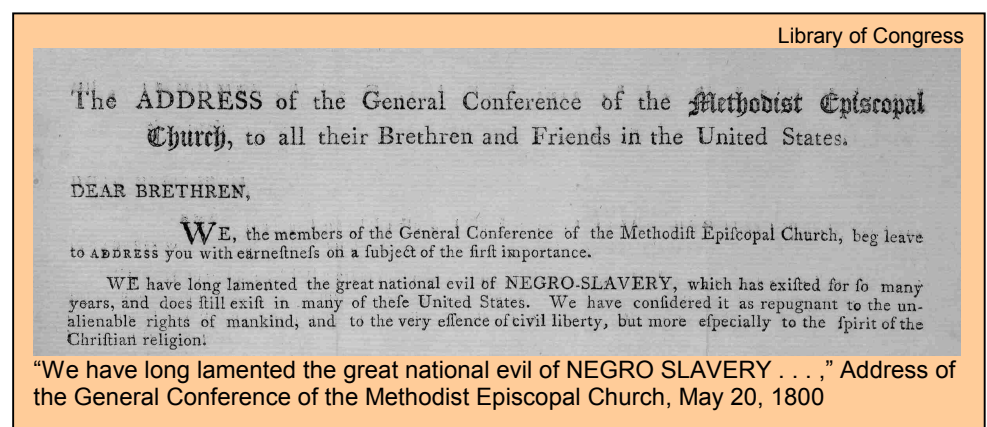
I pondered well the whole matter in view of my responsibilities, searched the Bible for the true fulfillment of promise and prophecy, prayed to God for light and Divine aid, and proclaimed open war against these delusions. In the midst of them along came the Shakers, and Mr. Rankin, one of the Presbyterian revival preachers, joined them; Mr. G. Wall, a visionary local preacher among the Methodists, joined them; all the country was in commotion.

I made public appointments and drew multitudes together, and openly showed from the Scriptures that these delusions were false. Some of these visionary men and women prophesied that God would kill me. The Shakers soon pretended to seal my damnation. But nothing daunted, for I knew Him in whom I had believed, I threw my appointments in the midst of them, and proclaimed to listening thousands the more sure word of prophecy. This mode of attack threw a damper on these visionary, self-deluded, false prophets, sobered some, reclaimed others, and stayed the fearful tide of delusion that was sweeping over the country. . . .

Slavery had long been agitated in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and our preachers, although they did not feel it to be their duty to meddle with it politically, yet, as Christians and Christian ministers, be it spoken to their eternal credit, they believed it to be their duty to bear their testimony against slavery as a moral evil, and this is the reason why the General Conference, from time to time, passed rules and regulations to govern

preachers and members of the Church in regard to this great evil. The great object of the General Conference was to keep the ministry clear of it, and there can be no doubt that the course pursued by early Methodist

preachers was the cause of the emancipation of thousands of this degraded race of human beings; and it is clear to my mind, if Methodist preachers had kept clear of slavery themselves, and gone on bearing honest testimony against it, that thousands upon thousands more would have been emancipated who are now groaning under an oppression almost too intolerable to be borne. Slavery is certainly a domestic, political,



and moral evil. Go into a slave community, and you not only see the dreadful evils growing out of the system in the almost universal licentiousness which prevails among the slaves themselves, but their young masters are often tempted and seduced from the paths of virtue, from the associations in which they are placed; and there is an under-current of heart-embittering feeling of many ladies of high and noble virtue, growing out of the want of fidelity of their husbands, and the profligate course of their sons. Let anyone travel through slave states, and see the thousands of mixed blood, and then say if I have misrepresented the dreadful causes of domestic disquietude that often falls with mountain weight on honorable wives and mothers. And although, in the infancy of this republic, it seemed almost impossible to form a strong and democratic confederacy, and maintain their independence without compromising constitutionally this political evil, and thereby fixing a stain on this “Land of the free and home of the brave,” yet it was looked upon as a great national or political evil, and by none more so than General Washington, the father of the republic. I will not attempt to enumerate the moral evils that have been produced by slavery; their name is legion. And now, notwithstanding these are my honest views of slavery, I have never seen a rabid abolition or free-soil society that I could join, because they resort to unjustifiable agitation, and the means they employ are generally, unchristian. They condemn and confound the innocent with the guilty; the means they employ are not truthful, at all times; and I am perfectly satisfied that if force is resorted to, this glorious Union will be dissolved, a civil war will follow, death and carnage will ensue, and the only free nation on the earth will be destroyed. . . .

Methodist preachers in those days made it a matter of conscience not to hold their fellow-creatures in bondage, if it was practicable to emancipate them, conformably to the laws of the state in which they lived. Methodism increased and spread; and many Methodist preachers, taken from comparative poverty, not able to own a negro, and who preached loudly against it, improved, and became popular among slaveholders; and many of them married into those slaveholding families, and became personally interested in slave property, (as it is called.) Then they began to apologize for the evil; then to justify it, on legal principles; then on Bible principles; till lo and behold! it is not an evil, but a good! it is not a curse, but a blessing! till really you would think, to hear them tell the story, if you had the means and did not buy a good lot of them, you would go to the devil for not enjoying the labor, toil, and sweat of this degraded race, and all this without rendering them any equivalent whatever!

I will here repeat what I have elsewhere stated in this narrative: that I verily believe, if the Methodist preachers had gone on as in olden times, bearing a testimony against the moral evil of slavery, and kept clear of it themselves, and never meddled with it politically, and formed no free-soil or abolition societies, and given all their money and the productions of their pens in favor of the colonization organizations, that long before this time many of the slave states would have been free states; and, in my

opinion, this is the only effectual way to get clear of slavery. If agitation must succeed agitation, strife succeed strife, compromise succeed compromise, it will end in a dissolution of this blessed Union, civil war will follow, and rivers of human blood stain the soil of our happy country. . . .

From the earliest of my recollection, up to this time, 1816, there were scarcely any books of any kind in this now mighty West; but especially was there a great scarcity of Bibles and Testaments. We were young and poor as a nation; had but a few years gained our liberty; had hardly begun to live as a republic after a bloody and devastating war for our independence; and although Congress, the very first year after the declaration of our independence, had wisely taken steps for furnishing the struggling infant for independence with the word of God, and did order that precious book, yet there was a great lack of the Bible, especially in the wilderness of the West; but this year the Lord put it into the hearts of some of his people to organize a Bible Society, which was done on the 11th of May, 1816; and although at first it was a feeble concern, yet God has prospered it, and millions upon millions of this precious book have been printed and circulated, and it is pouring streams of light, life, and knowledge upon almost every nation of this sin-stricken world. . . . Nothing but the principles of the Bible can save our happy nation or the world, and every friend of religion ought to spread the Bible to the utmost of his power and means. . . .

[I]n 1820-21 our membership [was] eighty-seven thousand one hundred and thirty-nine, and our traveling preachers two hundred and eighty. See what God has done for our “*far West*.” From the time I had joined the traveling ranks in 1804 to 1820-21, a period of sixteen years, from thirty-two traveling preachers, we had increased to two hundred and eighty; and from eleven thousand eight hundred and seventy-seven members, we had now over eighty-seven thousand; and there was not a single literary man among those preachers.

<u>Kentucky Conference</u> <u>Methodist Episcopal Church</u>		
	<u>1804</u>	<u>1820-21</u>
Membership	11,877	87,239
Traveling Preachers	32	280
chart added by NHC		